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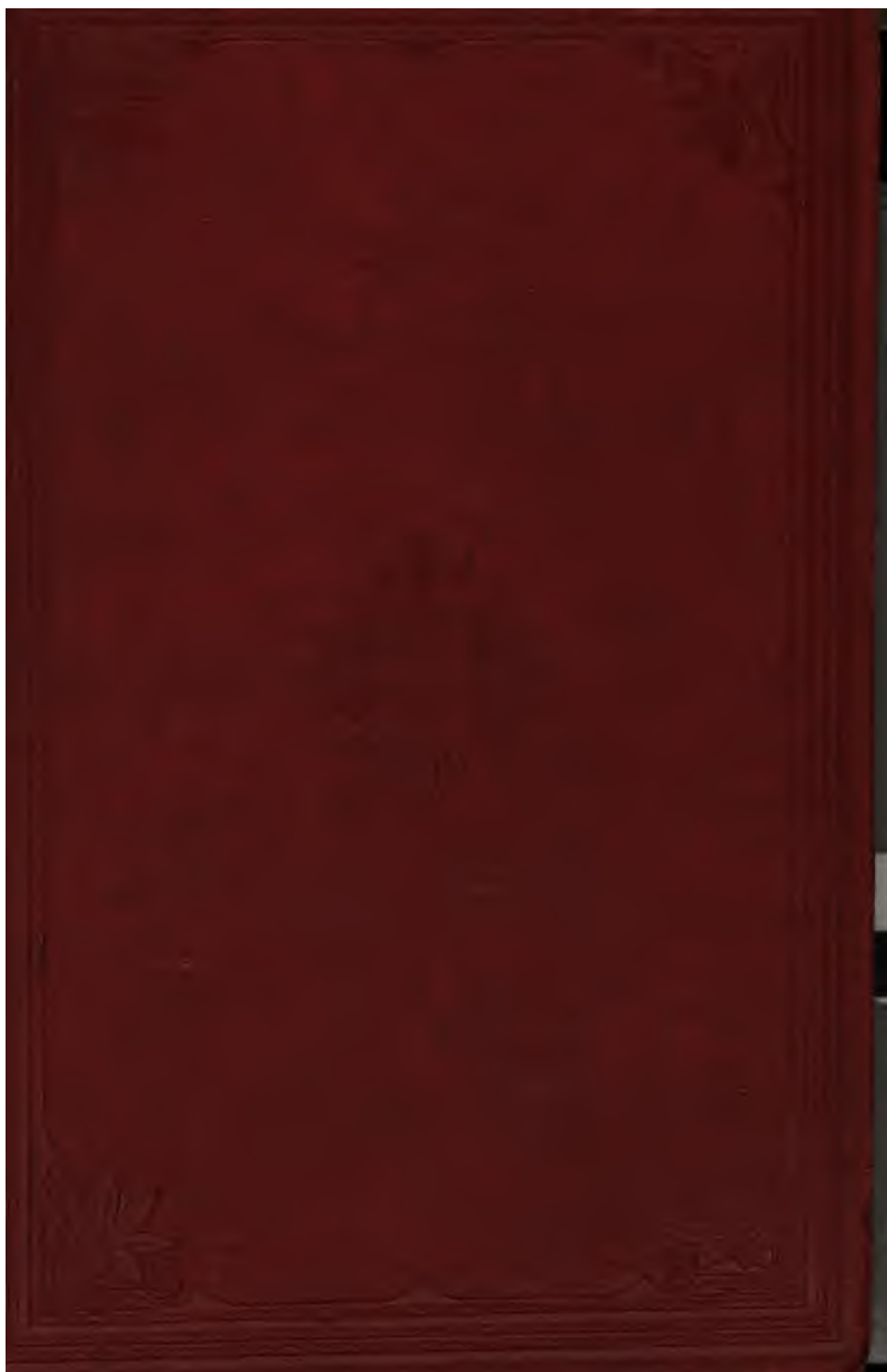
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TO THAT WRITER,
SO GENIAL, SO BRILLIANT, SO PHILOSOPHIC,
WHOM ALL THE WORLD READS AS
HARRY LORREQUER AND AS CORNELIUS O'DOWD,
AND TO THAT FRIEND
HOW LOVED AND HONOURED!
KNOWN TO THE PRIVILEGED AS
CHARLES LEVER,
THIS STORY,
HOW UNWORTHY AN OFFERING ALL BUT HE WILL PERCEIVE,
IS DEDICATED
BY
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GUY DEVERELL.

CHAPTER I.

SIR JEKYL MARLOWE AT THE PLOUGH INN.

THE pretty little posting station, known as the Plough Inn, on the Old London Road, where the Sterndale Road crosses it, was in a state of fuss and awe, at about five o'clock on a fine sharp October evening, for Sir Jekyl Marlowe, a man of many thousand acres, and M.P. for the county, was standing with his back to the fire, in the parlour, whose bow-window looks out on the ancient thoroughfare I have mentioned, over the row of scarlet geraniums which beautify the window-stone.

'Hollo!' cried the Baronet, as the bell-rope came down in answer to an energetic

but not angry pull, and he received Mrs. Jones, his hostess, who entered at the moment, with the dismantled bell-handle still in his hand. 'At my old tricks, you see. I've been doing you a mischief, hey? but we'll set it right in the bill, you know. How devilish well you look! wonderful girl, by Jove! Come in, my dear, and shut the door. Not afraid of me. I want to talk of ducks and mutton-chops. I've had no luncheon, and I'm awfully hungry,' said the comely Baronet in a continued chuckle.

The Baronet was, by that awful rebound volume of dates, which is one of the melancholy drawbacks of aristocracy, set down just then, and by all whom it might concern, ascertainable to be precisely forty-nine years and three months old; but so well had he worn, and so cleverly was he got up, that he might have passed for little more than forty.

He was smiling, with very white teeth, and a gay leer on pretty Mrs. Jones, an old friend, with black eyes and tresses, and pink cheeks, who bore her five-and-thirty years

as well almost as he did his own burthen. The slanting autumnal sun became her, and she simpered and courtesied and blushed the best she could.

‘Well, you pretty little devil, what can you do for me—hey? You know we’re old friends—hey? What have you got for a hungry fellow? and don’t stand at the door there, hang it—come in, can’t you? and let me hear what you say.’

So Mrs. Jones, with a simpering bashfulness, delivered her bill of fare off book.

The Baronet was a gallant English gentleman, and came of a healthy race, though there were a ‘beau’ and an archbishop in the family; he could rough it good-humouredly on beefsteak and port, and had an accommodating appetite as to hours.

‘That will do very nicely, my dear, thank you. You’re just the same dear hospitable little rogue I remember you—how long is it, by Jove, since I stopped here that day, and the awful thunderstorm at night, don’t you recollect? and the whole house in such a devil of a row, egad!’ And the Baronet

chuckled and leered, with his hands in his pockets.

‘Three years, by Jove, I think—eh?’

‘Four years in August last, Sir Jekyl,’ she answered, with a little toss of her head and a courtesy.

‘Four years, my dear—four devils! Is it possible? why upon my life it has positively improved you.’ And he tapped her cheek playfully with his finger. ‘And what o’clock is it?’ he continued, looking at his watch, ‘just five. Well, I suppose you’ll be ready in half-an-hour—eh, my dear?’

‘Sooner, if you wish, Sir Jekyl.’

‘No, thank you, dear, that will do very nicely; and stay,’ he added, with a pluck at her pink ribbon, as she retreated: ‘you’ve some devilish good port here, unless it’s all out—old Lord Hogwood’s stock—eh?’

‘More than two dozen left, Sir Jekyl; would you please some?’

‘You’ve hit it, you wicked little conjurer—a bottle; and you must give me a few minutes after dinner, and a cup of coffee, and tell me all the news—eh?’

The Baronet, standing on the threadbare hearthrug, looked waggishly, as it were, through the panels of the shut door, after the fluttering cap of his pretty landlady. Then he turned about and reviewed himself in the sea-green mirror over the chimney-piece, adjusted his curls and whiskers with a touch or two of his fingers' ends, and plucked a little at his ample silk necktie, and shook out his tresses, with his chin a little up, and a saucy simper.

But a man tires even of that prospect; and he turned on his heel, and whistled at the smoky mezzotint of George III. on the opposite wall. Then he turned his head, and looked out through the bow-window, and his whistling, stopped in the middle of a bar, at sight of a young man whom he espied, only a yard or two before the covered porch of the little inn.

This young gentleman was, it seemed, giving a parting direction to some one in the doorway. He was tall, slender, rather dark, and decidedly handsome. There were, indeed, in his air, face, and costume, that

indescribable elegance and superiority which constitute a man 'distinguished looking.'

When Sir Jekyl beheld this particularly handsome young man, it was with a disagreeable shock, like the tap on a big drum, upon his diaphragm. If anyone had been there he would have witnessed an odd and grizzly change in the pleasant Baronet's countenance. For a few seconds he did not move. Then he drew back a pace or two, and stood at the further side of the fire, with the mantelpiece partially between him and the young gentleman who spoke his parting directions, all unconscious of the haggard stare which made Sir Jekyl look a great deal less young and good-natured than was his wont.

This handsome young stranger, smiling, signalled with his cane, as it seemed, to a companion, who had preceded him, and ran in pursuit.

For a time Sir Jekyl did not move a muscle; and then, with a sudden pound on the chimney-piece, and a great oath, he exclaimed—

‘I could not have believed it! What the devil can it mean?’

Then the Baronet bethought him—‘What confounded stuff one does talk and think, sometimes! Half the matter dropt out of my mind. Twenty years ago, by Jove, too. *More than that, egad!* How could I be such an ass?’

And he countermarched, and twirled on his heel into his old place, with his back to the fire, and chuckled and asked again—

‘How the plague *could* I be such a fool?’

And after some more of this sort of catechism he began to ruminate oddly once more, and, said he—

‘It’s plaguy *odd*, for all that.’

And he walked to the window, and, with his face close to the glass, tried in vain to see the stranger again. The bow-window did not command the road far enough to enable him to see any distance; and he stuck his hat on his head, and marched by the bar, through the porch, and, standing upon the road itself, looked shrewdly in the same direction.

-

But the road makes a bend about there, and between the hedgerows of that wooded country the vista was not far.

With a cheerful air of carelessness, Sir Jekyl returned and tapped on the bar window.

‘I say, Mrs. Jones, who’s that good-looking young fellow that went out just now?’

‘The gentleman in the low-crowned hat, sir, with the gold-headed cane, please?’

‘Yes, a tall young fellow, with large dark eyes, and brown hair.’

‘That will be Mr. Strangers, Sir Jekyl.’

‘Does he sleep here to-night?’

‘Yes, sir, please.’

‘And what’s his business?’

‘Oh, dear! No business, Sir Jekyl, please. He’s a real gentleman, and no end of money.’

‘I mean, how does he amuse himself?’

‘A looking after prospects, and old places, and such like, Sir Jekyl. Sometimes riding and sometimes a fly. Every day some place or other.’

‘Oh! pencils and paint-boxes—eh?’

'I aven't seen none, sir. I can't say how that will be.'

'Well, and what is he about; where is he gone; where is he now?' demanded the Baronet.

'What way did Mr. Strangers go, Bill, just now?' the lady demanded of boots, who appeared at the moment.

'The Abbey, ma'am.'

'The Abbey, please, Sir Jekyl.'

'The Abbey—that's Wail Abbey—eh? How far is it?'

'How far will it be, Bill?'

'Taint a mile all out, ma'am.'

'Not quite a mile, Sir Jekyl.'

'A good ruin—isn't it?' asked the Baronet.

'Well, they do say it's *very* much out of repair; but I never saw it myself, Sir Jekyl.'

'Neither did I,' said Sir Jekyl. 'I say, my good fellow, you can point it out, I dare say, from the steps here?'

'Ay, please, Sir Jekyl.'

'You'll have dinner put back, Sir—please, Sir Jekyl?' asked Mrs. Jones.

‘Back or forward, *any* way, my dear child. Only I’ll have my walk first.’

And kissing and waving the tips of his fingers, with a smile to Mrs. Jones, who courtesied and simpered, though her heart was perplexed with culinary solitudes ‘how to keep the water from getting into the trout, and prevent the ducks of over-roasting,’ the worthy Baronet, followed by Bill, stept through the porch, and on the ridge of the old highroad, his own heart being oddly disturbed with certain cares which had given him a long respite; there he received Bill’s directions as to the route to the Abbey.

It was a clear frosty evening. The red round sun by this time, near the horizon, looked as if a tall man on the summit of the western hill might have touched its edge with his finger. The Baronet looked on the declining luminary as he buttoned his loose coat across his throat, till his eyes were almost dazzled, thinking all the time of nothing but that handsome young man; and as he walked on briskly toward the

Abbey, he saw little pale green suns dancing along the road and wherever else his eyes were turned.

‘I’ll see this fellow face to face, and talk a bit with him. I dare say if one were near he’s not at all so like. It is devilish odd though ; twenty-five years and not a relation on earth—and dead—hang him ! Egad, its like the Wandering Jew, and the what do you call ’em, *vitee*. Ay, here it is.’

He paused for a moment, looking at the pretty stile which led a little pathway across the fields to the wooded hollow by the river, where the ruin stands. Two old white stone, fluted piers, once a doorway, now tufted with grass, and stained and worn by time, and the stile built up between.

‘I know, of course, there’s nothing in it ; but it’s so odd—it is so *devilish* odd. I’d like to know all about it,’ said the Baronet, picking the dust from the fluting with the point of his walking-cane. ‘Where has he got, I wonder, by this time?’ So he mounted the stile, and paused near the summit to obtain a commanding view.

‘Well, I suppose he’s got among the old walls and rubbish by this time. I’ll make him out; he’ll break cover.’

And he skipped down the stile on the other side, and whistled a little, cutting gaily in the air with his cane as he went.

But for all he could do the same intensely uncomfortable curiosity pressed upon him as he advanced. The sun sank behind the distant hills, leaving the heavens flooded with a discoloured crimson, and the faint silver of the moon in the eastern sky glimmered coldly over the fading landscape, as he suddenly emerged from the hedged pathway on the rich meadow level by the slow river’s brink, on which, surrounded by lofty timber, the ruined Abbey stands.

The birds had come home. Their vesper song had sunk with the setting sun, and in the sad solitude of twilight the grey ruins rose dimly before him.

‘A devilish good spot for a picnic!’ said he, making an effort to recover his usual agreeable vein of thought and spirits.

So he looked up and about him, and

jauntily marched over the sward, and walked along the line of the grey walls until he found a doorway, and began his explorations.

Through dark passages, up broken stairs, over grass-grown piles of rubbish, he peeped into all sorts of roofless chambers. Everything was silent and settling down into night. At last, by that narrow doorway, which in such buildings so oddly gives entrance here and there into vast apartments, he turned into that grand chamber, whose stone floor rests on the vaults beneath; and there the Baronet paused for a moment with a little start, for at the far end, looking towards him, but a little upward, with the faint reflected glow that entered through the tall row of windows, on the side of his face and figure, stood the handsome young man of whom he was in pursuit.

The Baronet being himself only a step or two from the screw stairs, and still under the shadow of the overhanging arch in the 'corner, the stranger saw nothing of him and to announce his approach, though not

much of a musician, he hummed a bar or two briskly as he entered, and marched across and about as if thinking of nothing but architecture or the picturesque.

‘Charming ruin this, sir,’ exclaimed he, raising his hat, so soon as he had approached the stranger sufficiently near to make the address natural. ‘Although I’m a resident of this part of the world, I’m ashamed to say I never saw it before.’

The young man raised his hat too, and bowed with a ceremonious grace, which, as well as his accent, had something foreign in it.

‘While I, though a stranger, have been unable to resist its fascination, and have already visited it three times. You have reason to be proud of your county, sir, it is full of beauties.’

The stranger’s sweet, but peculiar, voice thrilled the Baronet with a recollection as vivid and detested. In fact this well-seasoned man of the world was so much shocked that he answered only with a bow, and cleared his voice, and chuckled after his

fashion, but all the time felt a chill creeping over his back.

There was a broad bar of a foggy red light falling through the ivy-girt window, but the young man happened to stand at that moment in the shadow beside it, and when the Baronet's quick glance, instead of detecting some reassuring distinction of feature or expression, encountered only the ambiguous and obscure, he recoiled inwardly as from something abominable.

'Beautiful effect — beautiful sky!' exclaimed Sir Jekyl, not knowing very well what he was saying, and waving his cane upwards towards the fading tints of the sky.

The stranger emerged from his shadow and stood beside him, and such light as there was fell full upon his features, and as the Baronet beheld he felt as if he were in a dream.

CHAPTER II.

THE BARONET VISITS WARDLOCK MANOR.

IN fact Sir Jekyl would have been puzzled to know exactly what to say next, so odd were his sensations, and his mind so pre-occupied with a chain of extremely uncomfortable conjecture, had not the handsome young gentleman who stood beside him at the gaping window with its melancholy folds of ivy, said—

‘I have often tried to analyse the peculiar interest of ruins like these—the mixture of melancholy and curiosity. I have seen very many monasteries abroad—perhaps as old as this, even older—still peopled with their monks, with very little interest indeed, and no sympathy; and yet here I feel a yearning after the bygone age of English monasticism, an anxiety to learn all about their ways and doings, and a sort of rever-

ence and sadness I can't account for, unless it be an expression of that profound sympathy which mortals feel with every expression of decay and dissolution.'

The Baronet fancied that he saw a lurking smile in the young man's face, and recoiled from psychologic talk about mortality.

'I dare say you're right, sir, but I am the worst metaphysician in the world.' He thought the young man smiled again. 'In your liking for the picturesque, however, I quite go with you. Do you intend extending your tour to Wales and Scotland?'

'I can hardly call this little excursion a tour. The fact is, my curiosity is pretty much limited to this county; there are old reasons which make me feel a very particular interest in it,' said the young man, with a very pointed carelessness and a smile, which caused the Baronet inwardly to wince.

'I should be very happy,' said Sir Jekyl, 'if you would take Marlowe in your way: there are some pictures there, as well as some views you might like to see. I am

Sir Jekyl Marlowe, and own two or three places in this county, which are thought pretty—and, may I give you my card?’

The snowy parallelogram was here presented and accepted with a mutual bow. The stranger was smiling oddly as Sir Jekyl introduced himself, with an expression which he fancied he could read in spite of the dark, as implying ‘rather old news you tell me.’

‘And—and—what was I going to say?—oh!—yes—if I can be of any use to you in procuring access to any house or place you wish to see, I shall be very happy. You are at present staying at my occasional quarters, the “Plough.” I’m afraid you’ll think me very impertinent and intrusive; but I should like to be able to mention your name to some of my friends, who don’t usually allow strangers to see their places.’

This was more like American than English politeness; but the Baronet was determined to know all about the stranger, commencing with his name, and the laws of good breeding, though he knew them very

well, were not likely to stand long in his way when he had made up his mind to accomplish an object.

‘My name is Guy Strangways,’ said the stranger.

‘O—ho—it’s very odd!’ exclaimed the Baronet, in a sharp snarl, quite unlike his previous talk. I think the distance between them was a little increased, and he was looking askance upon the young gentleman, who made him a very low foreign bow.

There was a silence, and just then a deep metallic voice from below called, ‘Guy—hollo!’

‘Excuse me—just a moment,’ and the young man was gone. The Baronet waited.

‘He’ll be back,’ muttered Sir Jekyl, ‘in a minute.’

But the Baronet was mistaken. He waited at that open window, whistling out upon the deepening twilight, till the edges of the ivy began to glitter in the moonbeams, and the bats to trace their zigzags in the air; and at last he gave over expecting.

He looked back into the gloomy void of that great chamber, and listened, and felt rather angry at his queer sensations. He had not turned about when the stranger withdrew, and did not know the process of his vanishing, and for the first time it struck him, 'who the plague could the fellow who *called* him be?'

On the whole he wished himself away, and he lighted a cigar for the sake of its vulgar associations, and made his way out of the ruins, and swiftly through darkened fields toward the Old London Road; and was more comfortable than he cared to say, when he stepped through the porch into the open hall of the 'Plough,' and stopped before the light at the bar, to ask his hostess once more, quite in his old way, whether Mr. Strangways had returned.

'No, not yet; always uncertain; his dinner mostly overdone.'

'Has he a friend with him?'

'Yes, sir, sure.'

'And what is he like?'

'Older man, Sir Jekyl, a long way than

young Mr. Guy Strangways; some relation I do think.'

'When do they leave you?'

'To-morrow evening, with a chaise and pair for Aukworth.'

'Aukworth? why, that's another of my properties!—ha, ha, by Jove! Does he know the Abbey here is mine?'

'I rayther think not Sir Jekyl. Would you please to wish dinner?'

'To be sure, you dear little quiz, dinner by all means; and let them get my horses to in half-an-hour; and if Mr. Strangways should return before I go, I'd like to see him, and don't fail to let me know—do ye see?'

Dinner came and went, but Mr. Strangways did not return, which rather vexed Sir Jekyl, who, however, left his card for that gentleman, together with an extremely polite note, which he wrote at the bar with his hat on, inviting him and his companion to Marlowe, where he would be at home any time for the next two months, and trusted they would give him a week before they left the country.

It was now dark, and Sir Jekyl loitered under the lamplight of his chaise for a while, in the hope that Mr. Strangways would turn up. But he did not; and the Baronet jumped into the vehicle, which was forthwith in motion.

He sat in the corner, with one foot on the cushion, and lighted a cigar. His chuckling was all over, and his quizzing, for the present. Mrs. Jones had not a notion that he was in the least uneasy, or on any but hospitable thoughts intent. But anyone who now looked in his face would have seen at a glance how suddenly it had become overcast with black care.

'Guy Strangways!' he thought; 'those two names, and his wonderful likeness! Prowling about this county! Why this more than another? He seemed to take a triumphant pleasure in telling me of his special fancy for this county. And his voice—a tenor they call it—I hate that sweet sort of voice. Those d—— singing fellows. I dare say he sings. They never do a bit of good. It's very odd. It's the

same voice. I forgot that odd silvery sound. The *same*, by Jove! I'll come to the bottom of the whole thing. D—— me, I will!

Then the Baronet puffed away fast and earnestly at his cigar, and then lighted another, and after that a third. They steadied him, I dare say, and helped to oil the mechanism of thought. But he had not recovered his wonted cheer of mind when the chaise drew up at a pair of time-worn fluted piers, with the gable of an old-fashioned dwelling-house overlooking the road at one side. An iron gate admitted to a court-yard, and the hall door of the house was opened by an old-fashioned footman, with some flour on the top of his head.

Sir Jekyl jumped down.

'Your mistress quite well, hey? My daughter ready?' inquired the Baronet. 'Where are they? No, I'll not go up, thank you; I'll stay here,' and he entered the parlour. 'And, do you see, you just go up and ask your mistress if she wishes to see me.'

By this time Sir Jekyl was poking up the fire and frowning down on the bars, with the flickering glare shooting over his face.

‘Can the old woman have anything to do with it? Pooh! no. I’d like to see her. But who knows what sort of a temper she’s in?’

As he thus ruminated, the domestic with the old-fashioned livery and floured head returned to say that his mistress would be happy to see him.

The servant conducted him up a broad stair with a great oak banister, and opening a drawing-room door, announced—

‘Sir Jekyl Marlowe.’

He was instantly in the room, and a tall, thin old lady, with a sad and stately mien, rose up to greet him.

‘How is little mamma?’ cried the Baronet, with his old chuckle. ‘An age since we met, hey? How well you look!’

The old lady gave her thin mittened hand to her son-in-law, and looked a grim and dubious sort of welcome upon him.

‘Yes, Jekyl, an age; and only that Beatrix is here, I suppose another age would have passed without my seeing you. And an old woman at my years has not many ages between her and the grave.’

The old lady spoke not playfully, but sternly, like one who had suffered long and horribly, and who associated her sufferings with her visitor; and in her oblique glance was something of deep-seated antipathy.

‘Egad! you’re younger than I, though you count more years. You live by clock and rule, and you show it. You’re as fresh as that bunch of flowers there; while I am literally knocking myself to pieces—and I know it—by late hours, and all sorts of nonsense. So you must not be coming the old woman over me, you know, unless you want to frighten me. And how is Beatrix? How do, Beatrix? All ready, I see. Good child.’

Beatrix at this moment was entering. She was tall and slightly formed, with large dark eyes, hair of soft shadowy black, and those tints of pure white and rich clear

blush, scarlet lips, and pearly teeth, and long eyelashes, which are so beautiful in contrast and in harmony. She had the prettiest little white nose, and her face was formed in that decided oval which so heightens the charm of the features. She was not a tragic heroine. Her smile was girlish and natural—and the little ring of pearls between her lips laughed beautifully—and her dimples played on chin and cheek as she smiled.

Her father kissed her, and looked at her with a look of gratification, as he might on a good picture that belonged to him; and turning her smiling face, with his finger and thumb upon her little dimpled chin, toward Lady Alice, he said—

‘Pretty well, this girl, hey?’

‘I dare say, Jekyl, she’ll do very well; she’s not formed yet, you know,’—was stately Lady Alice’s qualified assent. She was one of that school who are more afraid of spoiling people than desirous of pleasing them by admiration. ‘She promises to be like her darling mother; and that is

a melancholy satisfaction to me, and, of course, to you. You'll have some tea, Jekyl?'

The Baronet was standing, hat in hand, with his outside coat on, and his back to the fire, and a cashmere muffler loosely about his throat.

'Well, as it is here, I don't mind.'

'May I run down, grandmamma, and say good-bye to Ellen and old Mrs. Mason?'

'Surely—you mean, of course to the parlour? You may have them there.'

'And you must not be all night about it, Beatrix. We'll be going in a few minutes. D'ye mind?'

'I'm quite ready, papa,' said she; and as she glided from the room she stole a glance at her bright reflection in the mirror.

'You are always in a hurry, Jekyl, to leave me when you chance to come here. I should be sorry, however, to interfere with the pleasanter disposition of your time.'

'Now, little mother, you mustn't be

huffed with me. I have a hundred and fifty things to look after at Marlowe when I get there. I have not had a great deal of time, you know—first the session, then three months knocking about the world.'

'You never wrote to me since you left Paris,' said the old lady, grimly.

'Didn't I? That was very wrong! But you knew those were my holidays, and I detest writing; and you knew I could take care of myself; and it is so much better to tell one's adventures than to put them into letters, don't you think?'

'If one could tell them all in five minutes,' replied the old lady, drily.

'Well, but you'll come over to Marlowe—you really must—and I'll tell you everything there—the truth, the whole truth, and as much more as you like.'

This invitation was repeated every year, but, like Don Juan's to the statue, was not expected to lead to a literal visit.

'You have haunted rooms there, Jekyl,' she said, with an unpleasant smile and a nod. 'You have not kept house in Mar-

lowe for ten years, I think. Why do you go there now ?'

'Caprice, whim, what you will,' said the Baronet, combing out his favourite whisker with the tips of his fingers, while he smiled on himself in the glass upon the chimney-piece, 'I wish *you'd* tell me, for *I* really don't know, except that I'm tired of Warton and Dartbroke, as I am of all monotony. I like change, you know.'

'Yes; you *like change*,' said the old lady, with a dignified sarcasm.

'I'm afraid it's a true bill,' admitted Sir Jekyl, with a chuckle. 'So you'll come to Marlowe and see us there—won't you ?'

'No, Jekyl—certainly *not*,' said the old lady, with intense emphasis.

A little pause ensued, during which the Baronet twiddled at his whisker, and continued to smile amusedly at himself in the glass.

'I wonder you could think of asking me to Marlowe, considering all that has happened there. I sometimes wonder at myself that I can endure to see you at all,

Jekyl Marlowe; and I don't think, if it were not for that dear girl, who is so like her sainted mother, I should ever set eyes on you again.'

'I'm glad we have that link. You make me love Beatrix better,' he replied. He was now arranging the elaborate breast-pin with its tiny chain, which was at that date in vogue.

'And so you are going to keep house at Marlowe?' resumed the lady, stiffly, not heeding the sentiment of his little speech.

'Well, so I purpose.'

'I don't like that house,' said the old lady, with a subdued fierceness.

'Sorry it does not please you, little mother,' replied Sir Jekyl.

'You know I don't like it,' she repeated.

'In that case you need not have told me,' he said.

'I choose to tell you. I'll say so as often as I see you—as often as I like.'

It was an odd conference—back to back—the old lady stiff and high—staring pale and grimly at the opposite wall. The

Baronet looking with a quizzical smile on his handsome face in the mirror—now plucking at a whisker—now poking at a curl with his finger-tip—and now in the same light way arranging the silken fall of his necktie.

‘There’s nothing my dear little mamma can say, I’ll not listen to with pleasure.’

‘There is much I might say you could not listen to with pleasure.’ The cold was growing more intense, and bitter in tone and emphasis, as she addressed the Italian picture of Adonis and his two dogs hanging on the distant wall.

‘Well, with *respect*, not with pleasure—no,’ said he, and tapped his white upper teeth with the nail of his middle finger.

‘Assuming, then, that you speak truth, it is high time, Jekyl Marlowe, that you should alter your courses—here’s your daughter, just come out. It is ridiculous, your affecting the vices of youth. Make up as you will—you’re past the middle age—you’re an elderly man now.’

‘You can’t vex me that way, you dear

old mamma,' he said, with a chuckle, which looked for the first time a little vicious in the glass. 'We baronets, you know, are all booked, and all the world can read our ages; but you women manage better—you and your two dear sisters, Winifred and Georgiana.'

'They are *dead*,' interrupted Lady Alice, with more asperity than pathos.

'Yes, I know, poor old souls—to be sure, peers' daughters die like other people, I'm afraid.'

'And when they do, are mentioned, if not with sorrow, at least with decent respect, by persons, that is, who know how to behave themselves.'

'There was a slight quiver in Lady Alice's lofty tone that pleased Sir Jekyl, as you might have remarked had you looked over his shoulder into the glass.

'Well, you know, I was speaking not of deaths but births, and only going to say if you look in the peerage you'll find all the men, poor devils, pinned to their birthdays, and the women left at large, to exercise

their veracity on the point ; but you need not care—you have not pretended to youth for the last ten years I think.’

‘ You are excessively impertinent, sir.’

‘ I *know* it,’ answered Sir Jekyl, with a jubilant chuckle.

A very little more, the Baronet knew, and Lady Alice Redcliffe would have risen gray and grim, and sailed out of the room. Their partings were often after this sort.

But he did not wish matters to go quite that length at present. So he said, in a sprightly way, as if a sudden thought had struck him—

‘ By Jove, I believe I *am devilish* impertinent, without knowing it though—and you have forgiven me so often, I’m sure you *will* once more, and I am really so much obliged for your kindness to Beatrix. I am, indeed.’

So he took her hand, and kissed it.

CHAPTER III.

CONCERNING TWO REMARKABLE PERSONS WHO
APPEARED IN WARDLOCK CHURCH.

LADY ALICE carried her thin Roman nose some degrees higher; but she said—

‘If I say anything disagreeable, it is not for the pleasure of giving you pain, Jekyl Marlowe; but I understand that you mean to have old General Lennox and his artful wife to stay at your house, and if so, I think it an arrangement that had better be dispensed with. I don’t think her an eligible acquaintance for Beatrix, and you know very well she’s *not*—and it is not a respectable or creditable kind of thing.’

‘Now, what d——d fool. I beg pardon—but who the plague has been filling your mind with those ridiculous stories—my dear little mamma? You know how ready

I am to confess; you *might* at least; I tell you everything; and I do assure you I *never* admired her. She's good looking, I know; but so are fifty pictures and statues I've seen, that don't please me.'

'Then it's true, the General and his wife are going on a visit to Marlowe?' insisted Lady Alice, drily.

'No, they are not. D—— me, I'm not thinking of the General and his wife, nor of any such d——d trumpery. I'd give something to know who the devil's taking these cursed liberties with my name.'

'Pray, Jekyl Marlowe, command your language. It can't the least signify who tells me; but you see I do sometimes get a letter.'

'Yes, and a precious letter too. Such a pack of lies did any human being ever hear fired off in a sentence before? I'm *épris* of Mrs. General Lennox. Thumper number one! She's a lady of—I beg pardon—easy virtue. Thumper number two! and I invite her and her husband down to Marlowe, to make love of course to her, and to

fight the old General. Thumper number three!’

And the Baronet chuckled over the three ‘thumpers’ merrily.

‘Don’t talk slang, if you please—gentlemen don’t, at least in addressing ladies.’

‘Well, then, I won’t; I’ll speak just as you like, only you must not blow me up any more; for really there is no cause, and we here only two or three minutes together, you know; and I want to tell you something, or rather to ask you—do you ever hear anything of those *Deverells*,^r you know?’

Lady Alice looked quite startled, and turned quickly half round in her chair, with her eyes on Sir Jekyl’s face. The Baronet’s smile subsided, and he looked with a dark curiosity in hers. A short but dismal silence followed.

‘You’ve heard from them?’

‘No!’ said the lady, with little change in the expression of her face.

‘Well, *of* them?’

‘No,’ she repeated; ‘but *why* do you ask? It’s *very* strange!’

‘*What’s* strange? Come, now, you *have* something to say; tell me what it is.’

‘I wonder, Jekyl, you ask for them, in the first place.’

‘Well—well, of course; but what next?’ murmured the Baronet, eagerly: ‘why is it so strange?’

‘Only because I’ve been thinking of them—a great deal—for the last few days; and it seemed very odd your asking; and in fact I fancy the same thing has happened to us both.’

‘Well, may be; but what *is* it?’ demanded the Baronet, with a sinister smile.

‘I have been startled; most painfully and powerfully affected; I have seen the most extraordinary resemblance to my beautiful, *murdered* Guy.’

She rose, and wept passionately, standing with her face buried in her handkerchief.

Sir Jekyl frowned with closed eyes and upturned face, waiting like a patient man bored to death, for the subsidence of the storm which he had conjured up. Very pale, too, was that countenance, and con-

tracted for a few moments with intense annoyance.

‘I saw the same fellow,’ said the Baronet, in a subdued tone, so soon as there was a subsidence, ‘this evening; he’s at that little inn on the Sterndale Road. Guy Strangways he calls himself; I talked with him for a few minutes; a gentlemanly young man; and I don’t know what to make of it. So I thought I’d ask you whether *you* could help me to a guess; and that’s all.’

The old lady shook her head.

‘And I don’t think you need employ quite such hard terms,’ he said.

‘I don’t want to speak of it at all,’ said she; ‘but if I do I can’t say less; nor I won’t—no, never!’

‘You see it’s very odd, those two names,’ said Sir Jekyl, not minding; ‘and as you say, the likeness so astonishing—I—I—what do *you* think of it?’

‘Of course it’s an accident,’ said the old lady.

‘I’m glad you think so,’ said he, abruptly.

‘Why, what could it be? you don’t be-

lieve in apparitions?’ she replied, with an odd sort of dryness.

‘I rather think not,’ said he; ‘I meant he left no very near relation, and I fancied those Deverell people might have contrived some trick, or intended some personation, or something, and I thought that you, perhaps, had heard something of their movements.’

‘Nothing—what could they have done, or why should they have sought to make any such impression? I don’t understand it. It is very extraordinary. But the likeness in church amazed and shocked me, and made me ill.’

‘In church, you say?’ repeated Sir Jekyl.

‘Yes, in church,’ and she told him in her own way, what I shall tell in mine, as follows:—

Last Sunday she had driven, in her accustomed state, with Beatrix, to Wardlock church. The church was hardly five hundred yards away, and the day bright and dry. But Lady Alice always arrived and departed in the coach, and sat in the Red-

cliffe seat, in the centre of the gallery. She and Beatrix sat face to face at opposite sides of the pew.

As Lady Alice looked with her cold and steady glance over the congregation in the aisle, during the interval of silence that precedes the commencement of the service, a tall and graceful young man, with an air of semi-foreign fashion, entered the church, accompanied by an elderly gentleman, of whom she took comparatively little note.

The young man and his friend were ushered into a seat confronting the gallery. Lady Alice gazed and gazed transfixed with astonishment and horror. The enamelled miniature on her bosom was like ; but there, in that clear, melancholy face, with its large eyes and wavy hair, was a resurrection. In that animated sculpture were delicate tracings and touches of nature's chisel, which the artist had failed to represent, which even memory had neglected to fix, but which all now returned with the startling sense of identity in a moment.

She had put on her gold spectacles, as

she always did on taking her seat, and opened her 'Morning Service,' bound in purple Russia, with its golden clasp and long ribbons fringed with the same precious metal, with the intent to mark the proper psalms and lessons at her haughty leisure. She therefore saw the moving image of her dead son before her, with an agonizing distinctness that told like a blight of palsy on her face.

She saw his elderly companion also distinctly. A round-shouldered man, with his short caped cloak still on. A grave man, with a large, high, bald forehead, a heavy, hooked nose, and great hanging moustache and beard. A dead and ominous face enough, except for the piercing glance of his full eyes, under very thick brows, and just the one you would have chosen out of a thousand portraits, for a plotting high-priest or an old magician.

This magus fixed his gaze on Lady Alice, not with an ostentation of staring, but sternly from behind the dark embrasure of his brows ; and leaning a little side-

ways, whispered something in the ear of his young companion, whose glance at the same moment was turned with a dark and fixed interest upon the old lady.

It was a very determined stare on both sides, and of course ill-bred, but mellowed by distance. The congregation were otherwise like other country congregations, awaiting the offices of their pastor, decent, listless, while this great stare was going on, so little becoming the higher associations and solemn aspect of the place. It was, with all its conventional screening, a fierce, desperate scrutiny, cutting the dim air with a steady congreve fire that crossed and glared unintermittent by the ears of deceased gentlemen in ruffs and grimy doublets, at their posthumous devotions, and brazen knights praying on their backs, and under the eyes of all the gorgeous saints, with glories round their foreheads, in attitudes of benediction or meekness, who edified believers from the eastern window.

Lady Alice drew back in her pew. Beatrix was in a young-lady reverie, and did

not observe what was going on. There was nothing indeed to make it very conspicuous. But when she looked at Lady Alice, she was shocked at her appearance, and instantly crossed, and said—

‘I am afraid you are ill, grandmamma ; shall we come away ?’

The old lady made no answer, but got up and took the girl’s arm, and left the seat very quietly. She got down the gallery stairs, and halted at the old window on the landing, and sate there a little, ghastly and still mute.

The cold air circulating upward from the porch revived her.

‘I am better, child,’ said she, faintly.

‘Thank Heaven,’ said the girl, whose terror at her state proved how intensely agitated the old lady must have been.

Mrs. Wrattles, the sextoness, emerging at that moment with repeated courtesies, and whispered condolence and inquiries, Lady Alice, with a stiff condescension, prayed her to call her woman, Mason, to her.

So Lady Alice, leaning slenderly on

Mason's stout arm, insisted that Beatrix should return and sit out the service ; and she herself, for the first time within the memory of man, returned from Wardlock church on foot, instead of in her coach. Beatrix waited until the congregation had nearly disgorged itself and dispersed, before making her solitary descent.

When she came down, without a chaperon, at the close of the rector's discourse, the floured footman in livery, with his gold-headed cane, stood as usual at the coach-door only to receive her, and convey the order to the coachman, 'home.'

The churchyard gate, as is usual, I believe, in old places of that kind, opens at the south side, and the road to Wardlock manor leads along the churchyard wall and round the corner of it at a sharp angle just at the point where the clumsy old stone mausoleum or vault of the Deverell family overlooks the road, with its worn pilasters and beetle-browed cornice.

Now that was a Sunday of wonders. It had witnessed Lady Alice's pedestrian re-

turn from church, an act of humiliation, almost of penance, such as the memory of Wardlock could furnish no parallel to; and now it was to see another portent, for her ladyship's own gray horses, fat and tranquil beasts, who had pulled her to and from church for I know not how many years, under the ministration of the careful coachman, with exemplary sedateness, on this abnormal Sabbath took fright at a musical performance of two boys, one playing the Jew's harp and the other drumming tambourine-wise on his hat, and *suadente diabolo* and so forth, set off at a gallop, to the terror of all concerned, toward home. Making the sharp turn of the road, where the tomb of the Deverells overhangs it from the churchyard, the near-gray came down, and his off-neighbour reared and plunged frightfully.

The young lady did not scream, but, very much terrified, she made voluble inquiries of the air and hedges from the window, while the purple coachman pulled hard from the box, and spoke comfortably to his horses,

and the footman, standing out of reach of danger, talked also in his own vein.

Simultaneously with all this, as if emerging from the old mausoleum, there sprang over the churchyard fence, exactly under its shadow, that young man who had excited emotions so various in the Baronet and in Lady Alice, and seized the horse by the head with both hands, and so cooperated that in less than a minute the two horses were removed from the carriage, and he standing, hat in hand, before the window, to assure the young lady that all was quite safe now.

So she descended, and the grave footman, with the Bible and Prayer-book, followed her steps with his gold-headed rod of office, while the lithe and handsome youth, his hat still in air which stirred his rich curls, walked beside her with something of that romantic deference which in one so elegant and handsome has an inexpressible sentiment of the tender in it.

He walked to the door of Wardlock Manor, and I purposely omit all he said,

because I doubt whether it would look as well in this unexceptionable type as it sounded from his lips in Beatrix Marlowe's pretty ear.

If the speaker succeed with his audience, what more can oratory do for him? Well! he was gone. There remained in Beatrix's ear a music; in her fancy a heaven-like image—a combination of tint, and outline, and elegance, which made every room and scene without it lifeless, and every other object homely. These little untold impressions are of course liable to fade and vanish pretty quickly in absence, and to be superseded even sooner. Therefore it would be unwarranted to say that she was in love, although I can't deny that she was haunted by that slightly foreign young gentleman.

This latter portion of the adventure was not divulged by old Lady Alice, because Beatrix, I suppose, forgot to tell her, and she really knew nothing about it. All the rest, her own observation and experience, she related with a grim and candid particularity.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GREEN CHAMBER AT MARLOWE.

So the Baronet, with a rather dreary chuckle, said:—

‘I don’t think, to say truth, there is anything in it. I really can’t see why the plague I should bore myself about it. You know your pew in the middle of the gallery, with that painted hatchment thing, you know’

‘Respect the dead,’ said Lady Alice, looking down with a dry severity on the table.

‘Well, yes; I mean, you know, it is so confoundedly conspicuous, I can’t wonder at the two fellows, the old and young, staring a bit at it, and, perhaps, at *you*, you know,’ said Sir Jekyl, in his impertinent vein. ‘But I agree with you they are no ghosts, and I really shan’t trouble my head about

them any more. I wonder I was such a fool—hey? But, as you say, you know, it is unpleasant to be reminded of—of those things; it can't be helped now, though.'

'Now, nor ever,' said Lady Alice, grimly.

'Exactly; neither now, nor ever,' repeated Sir Jekyl; 'and we both know it can't possibly be poor—I mean anyone concerned in that transaction; so the likeness must be accidental, and therefore of no earthly significance—eh?'

Lady Alice, with elevated brows, fiddled in silence with some crumbs on the table with the tip of her thin finger.

'I suppose Beatrix is ready; may I ring the bell?'

'Oh! here she is. Now, bid grandmamma good-night,' said the Baronet.

So slim and pretty Beatrix, in her cloak, stooped down and placed her arms about the neck of the old lady, over whose face came a faint flush of tender sunset, and her old grey eyes looked very kindly on the beautiful young face that stooped over her,

as she said, in a tone that, however, was stately—

‘ Good-bye, my dear child ; you are warm enough—you are certain ? ’

‘ Oh! yes, dear grandmamma—my cloak, and this Cashmere thing.’

‘ Well, darling, good-night. You’ll not forget to write—you’ll not fail? Good-night, Beatrix, dear—good-bye.’

‘ Good-night,’ said the Baronet, taking the tips of her cold fingers together, and addressing himself to kiss her cheek, but she drew back in one of her whims, and said, stiffly, ‘ There, not to-night. Good-bye, Jekyl.’

‘ Well,’ chuckled he, after his wont, ‘ another time ; but mind, you’re to come to Marlowe.’

He did not care to listen to what she replied, but he called from the stairs, as he ran down after his daughter—

‘ Now, mind, I won’t let you off this time ; you really must come. Good-night, *au revoir*—good-night.’

I really think that exemplary old lady hated the Baronet, who called her ‘ little

mamma,' and invited her every year, without meaning it, most good-naturedly, to join his party under the ancestral roof-tree. He took a perverse sort of pleasure in these affectionate interviews, in fretting her not very placid temper—in patting her, as it were, wherever there was a raw, and in fondling her against the grain; so that his caresses were cruel, and their harmony, such as it was, amounted to no more than a flimsy deference to the scandalous world.

But Sir Jekyl knew that there was nothing in this quarter to be gained in love by a different tactique; there was a dreadful remembrance, which no poor lady has ostrich power to digest, in the way; it lay there, hard, cold, and irreducible; and the morbid sensation it produced was hatred. He knew that 'little mamma,' humanly speaking, ought to hate him. His mother indeed she was not; but only the step-mother of his deceased wife. Mother-in-law is not always a very sweet relation, but with the prefix 'step' the chances are, perhaps, worse.

There was, however, as you will by-and-

by see, a terrible accident, or something, always remembered, gliding in and out of Wardlock Manor like the Baronet's double, walking in behind him when he visited her, like his evil genius, and when they met affectionately, standing by his shoulder, black and scowling, with clenched fist.

Now pretty Beatrix sat in the right corner of the chariot, and Sir Jekyl, her father, in the left. The lamps were lighted, and though there was moonlight, for they had a long stretch of road always dark, because densely embowered in the forest of Penlake. Tier over tier, file behind file, nodding together, the great trees bent over like plumed warriors, and made a solemn shadow always between their ranks.

Marlowe was quite new to Beatrix; but still too distant, twelve miles away, to tempt her to look out and make observations as she would on a nearer approach.

'You don't object to my smoking a cigar, Beatrix? The smoke goes out of the window, you know,' said the Baronet, after they had driven about a mile in silence.

What young lady, so appealed to by a parent, ever did object? The fact is, Sir Jekyl did not give himself the trouble to listen to her answer, but was manifestly thinking of something quite different, as he lighted his match.

When he threw his last stump out of the window they were driving through Penlake Forest, and the lamplight gleamed on broken rows of wrinkled trunks and ivy.

‘I suppose she told you all about it?’ said he, suddenly pursuing his own train of thought.

‘Who?’ inquired Beatrix.

‘I never was a particular favourite of her’s, you know—grandmamma’s, I mean. She does not love me, poor old woman! And she has a knack of making herself precious disagreeable, in which I try to imitate her, for peace’ sake, you know; for, by George, if I was not uncivil now and then, we could never get on at all.’

Sir Jekyl chuckled after his wont, as it were, between the bars of this recitative, and he asked—

‘What were the particulars—the adventure on Sunday—that young fellow, you know?’

Miss Beatrix had heard no such interrogatory from her grandmamma, whose observations in the church-aisle were quite as unknown to her; and thus far the question of Sir Jekyl was a shock.

‘Did not grandmamma tell you about it?’ he pursued.

‘About what, papa?’ asked Beatrix, who was glad that it was dark.

‘About her illness—a young fellow in a pew down in the aisle staring at her. By Jove! one would have fancied that sort of thing pretty well over. Tell me all about it.’

The fact was that this was the first she had heard of it.

‘Grandmamma told me nothing of it,’ said she.

‘And did not you see what occurred? Did not you see him staring?’ asked he.

Beatrix truly denied.

‘You young ladies are always thinking

of yourselves. So you saw nothing, and have nothing to tell?' That will do,' said Sir Jekyl, drily; and silence returned.

Beatrix was relieved on discovering that her little adventure was unsuspected. Very little was there in it, and nothing to reflect blame upon her. From her exaggeration of its importance, and her quailing as she fancied her father was approaching it, I conclude that the young gentleman had interested her a little.

And now, as Sir Jekyl in one corner of the rolling chariot brooded in the dark over his disappointed conjectures, so did pretty Beatrix in the other speculate on the sentences which had just fallen from his lips, and long to inquire some further particulars, but somehow dared not.

Could that tall and handsome young man, who had come to her rescue so unaccountably—the gentleman with those large, soft, dark eyes, which properly belong to heroes—have been the individual whose gaze had so mysteriously affected her grandmamma? What could the associations have been that

were painful enough so to overcome that grim, white woman? Was he a relation? Was he an outcast member of that proud family? Or, was he that heir-at-law, or embodied Nemesis, that the yawning sea or grave will sometimes yield up to plague the guilty or the usurper?

For all or any of these parts he seemed too young. Yet Beatrix fancied instinctively that he could be no other than the basilisk who had exercised so strange a spell over her grim, but withal kind old kinswoman.

Was there not, she thought, something peculiar in the look he threw across the windows of old stone-fronted Wardlock manor—reserved, curious, half-smiling—as if he looked on an object which he had often heard described, and had somehow, from personal associations or otherwise, an interest in? It was but a momentary glance just as he took his leave; but there was, she thought, that odd character in it.

By this time the lamps were flashing on the village windows and shop-fronts; and

at the end of the old gabled street, under a canopy of dark trees, stood the great iron gate of Marlowe.

Sir Jekyl rubbed the glass and looked out when they halted at the gate. The structures of his fancy had amused him, rather fearfully indeed, and he was surprised to find that they were entering the grounds of Marlowe so soon.

He did not mind looking out, or speaking to the old gamekeeper, who pulled open the great barriers, but lay back in his corner sullenly, in the attitude of a gentleman taking a nap.

Beatrix, however, looked out inquisitively, and saw by the misty moonlight a broad level studded with majestic timber—singly, in clumps, and here and there in solemn masses; and soon rose the broad-fronted gabled house before them, with its steep roofs and its hospitable clumps of twisted chimneys showing black against the dim sky.

Miss Marlowe's maid, to whom the scene was quite as new as to her mistress,

descended from the back seat, in cloaks and mufflers, and stood by the hall-door steps, that shone white in the moonlight, before their summons had been answered.

Committing his daughter to her care, the Baronet—who was of a bustling temperament, and never drank tea except from motives of gallantry — called for Mrs. Gwynn, the housekeeper, who presently appeared.

She was an odd-looking woman—some years turned of fifty, thin, with a longish face and a fine, white, glazed skin. There was something queer about her eyes: you soon discovered it to arise from their light colour and something that did not quite match in their pupils.

On entering the hall, where the Baronet had lighted a candle, having thrown his hat on the table, and merely loosed his muffler and one or two buttons of his outside coat, she smiled a chill gleam of welcome with her pale lips, and dropped two sharp little courtesies.

‘ Well, old Donica, and how do ye do ? ’

said the Baronet, smiling, with a hand on each thin grey silk shoulder. 'Long time since I saw you. But, egad! you grow younger and younger, you pretty old rogue;' and he gave her pale, thin cheek a playful tap with his fingers.

'Pretty well, please, Sir Jekyl, thank ye,' she replied, receding a little with dry dignity. 'Very welcome, sir, to Marlowe. Miss Beatrix looks very well, I am happy to see; and you, sir, also.'

'And you're glad to see us, I know?'

'Certainly, sir, glad to see you,' said Mrs. Gwynn, with another short courtesy.

'The servants not all come? No, nor Ridley with the plate. He'll arrive to-morrow; and—and we shall have the house full in little more than a week. Let us go up and look at the rooms; I forget them almost, by Jove—I really do—it's so long since. Light you another, and we'll do very well.'

'You'll see them better by daylight, sir. I kept everything well aired and clean. The house looks wonderful—it do,' replied Mrs.

Gwynn, accompanying the Baronet up the broad oak stairs.

‘If it looks as fresh as you, Donica, it’s a miracle of a house—egad! you’re a wonder. How you skip by my side, with your little taper, like a sylph in a ballet, egad!’

‘You wear pretty well yourself, Sir Jekyl,’ drily remarked the white-faced sylph, who had a sharp perpendicular line between her eyebrows, indicative of temper.

‘So they tell me, by Jove. We’re pretty well on through, Donnie—eh? Everyone knows my age—printed, you know, in the red book. You’ve the advantage of me there—eh, Don?’

‘I’m just fifty-six, sir, and I don’t care if all the world knewd it.’

‘All the world’s curious, I dare say, on the point; but I shan’t tell them, old Gwynn,’ said Sir Jekyl.

‘Curious or no, sir, it’s just the truth, and I don’t care to hide it. Past that folly now, sir, and I don’t care if I wor seventy, and a steppin’ like a——’

‘A sylph,’ supplied he.

‘Yes—a sylph—into my grave. It’s a

bad world, and them that's suffered in it soon tires on it, sir.'

'You have not had a great deal to trouble you. Neither chick, nor child, nor husband, egad! So here we are.'

They were now standing on the gallery, at the head of the great staircase.

'These are the rooms your letter says are not furnished—eh? Let us come to the front gallery.'

So, first walking down the gallery in which they were, to the right, and then entering a passage by a turn on the left, they reached the front gallery which runs parallel to that at the head of the stairs.

'Where have you put Beatrix?'

'She wished the room next mine, please, sir, upstairs,' answered the housekeeper.

'Near the front—eh?'

'The left side, please, sir, as you look from the front,' replied she.

'From the front?' he repeated.

'From the front,' she reiterated.

'Over there, then?' he said, pointing upward to the left.

'That will be about it, sir,' she answered.

‘How many rooms have we here in a row?’ he asked, facing down the gallery, with its file of doors at each side.

‘Four bed-rooms and three dressing-rooms at each side.’

‘Ay, well now, I’ll tell you who’s coming, and how to dispose of them.’

So Sir Jekyl quartered his friends, as he listed, and then said he—

‘And the large room at the other end, here to the right—come along.’

And Sir Jekyl marched briskly in the direction indicated.

‘Please, sir,’ said the slim, pale house-keeper, with the odd leer in her eye, overtaking him quietly.

‘Ay, here it is,’ said he, not minding her, and pushing open the door of a dressing-room at the end of the gallery. ‘Inside this, I remember.’

‘But that’s the green chamber, sir,’ continued Mrs. Gwynn, gliding beside him as he traversed the floor.

‘The room we call Sir Harry’s room, I know—capital room—eh?’

'I don't suppose,' began the pale lady, with a sinister sharpness.

'Well?' he demanded, looking down in her face a little grimly.

'It's the green chamber, sir,' she said, with a hard emphasis.

'You said so before, eh?' he replied.

'And I did not suppose, sir, you'd think of putting anyone there,' she continued.

'Then you're just as green as the chamber,' said Sir Jekyl, with a chuckle.

And he entered the room, holding the candle high in air, and looking about him a little curiously, the light tread and sharp pallid face of Donica Gwynn following him.

CHAPTER V.

SIR JEKYL BETHINKS HIM OF PELTER AND
CROWE.

THE Baronet held his candle high in air, as I have said, as he gazed round him inquisitively. The thin housekeeper, with her pale lips closed, and her odd eyes dropped slantingly toward the floor, at the corner of the room, held hers demurely in her right finger and thumb, her arms being crossed.

The room was large, and the light insufficient. Still you could not help seeing at a glance that it must be, in daylight, a tolerably cheerful one. It was roomy and airy, with a great bow-window looking to the front of the building, of which it occupied the extreme left, reaching about ten feet from the level of the more ancient frontage of the house. The walls were covered with stamped leather, chiefly green and gold,

and the whole air of the room, even in its unarranged state, though somewhat quaint and faded, was wonderfully gay and cozy.

‘This is the green chamber, sir,’ she repeated, with her brows raised and her eyes still lowered askance, and some queer wrinkles on her forehead, as she nodded a sharp bitter emphasis.

‘To be sure it is, damme!—why not?’ he said, testily, and then burst into a short laugh.

‘You’re not a going, I suppose, Sir Jekyl, to put anyone into it?’ said she.

‘I don’t see, for the life of me, why I should not—eh? a devilish comfortable room.’

‘Hem! I can’t but suppose you are a joking me, Sir Jekyl,’ persisted the gray silk phantom.

‘Egad! you forget how old we’re growing; why the plague should I quiz you! I want the room for old General Lennox, that’s all—though I’m not bound to tell you for whom I want it—am I?’

‘There’s a plenty o’ rooms without this

one, Sir Jekyl,' persevered the lady, sternly.

'Plenty, of course ; but none so good,' said he, carelessly.

'No one ever had luck that slept in it,' answered the oracle, lifting her odd eyes and fixing them on Sir Jekyl.

'I don't put them here for luck. We want to make them comfortable,' answered Sir Jekyl, poking at the furniture as he spoke.

'You know what was your father's wish about it, sir ?' she insisted.

'My father's wish—egad, he did not leave many of his wishes unsatisfied—eh ?' he answered, with another chuckle.

'And your poor lady's wish,' she said, a good deal more sharply.

'I don't know why the devil I'm talking to you, old Gwynn,' said the Baronet, turning a little fiercely about.

'*Dying* wishes,' emphasised she.

'It is time, Heaven knows, all that stuff should stop. You slept in it yourself, in my father's time. I remember you, here,

Donica, and I don't think I ever heard that you saw a ghost—did I?' he said, with a sarcastic chuckle.

She darted a ghastly look to the far end of the chamber, and then, with a strange, half-frozen fury, she said—

'I wish you good-night, Sir Jekyl,' and glided like a shadow out of the room.

'Saucy as ever, by Jupiter,' he ejaculated, following her with his glance, and trying to smile; and as the door shut, he looked again down the long apartment as she had just done, raising the candle again.

The light was not improved of course by the disappearance of Mrs. Gwynn's candle, and the end of the room was dim and unsatisfactory. The great four-poster, with dark curtains, and a plume at each corner, threw a vague shadow on the back wall and up to the ceiling, as he moved his candle, which at the distance gave him an uncomfortable sensation, and he stood for a few seconds sternly there, and then turned on his heel and quitted the room, saying aloud, as he did so—

‘What a d—d fool that old woman is—
always *was*!’

If there was a ghost there, the Baronet plainly did not wish it to make its exit from the green chamber by the door, for he locked it on the outside, and put the key in his pocket. Then, crossing the dressing-room I have mentioned, he entered the passage which crosses the gallery in which he and Mrs. Gwynn, a few minutes before, had planned their dispositions. The dressing-room door is placed close to the window which opens at the end of the corridor in the front of the house. Standing with his back to this, he looked down the long passage, and smiled.

For a man so little given to the melodramatic, it was a very well expressed smile of mystery—the smile of a man who knows something which others don’t suspect, and would be surprised to learn.

It was the Baronet’s fancy, as it had been his father’s and his grandfather’s before him, to occupy very remote quarters in this old house. Solitary birds, their roost was alone.

Candle in hand, Sir Jekyl descended the stairs, marched down the long gaunt passage, which strikes rearward so inflexibly, and at last reaches the foot of a back staircase, after a march of a hundred and forty feet, which I have measured.

At top of this was a door at his left, which he opened, and found himself in his own bed-room.

You would have said on looking about you that it was the bed-room of an old campaigner or of a natty gamekeeper—a fellow who rather liked roughing it, and had formed tastes in the matter like the great Duke of Wellington. The furniture was slight and plain, and looked like varnished deal; a French bed, narrow, with chintz curtains, and a plain white coverlet, like what one might expect in a barrack dormitory or an hospital; a little strip of carpet lying by the bed, and a small square of Turkey carpet under the table by the fire, hardly broke the shining uniformity of the dark oak floor; a pair of sporting prints decorated the sides of the chimney-

piece, and an oil-portrait of a grey hunter hung in the middle. There were fishing-rods and gun-cases, I dare say the keys were lost of many, they looked so old and dingy.

The Baronet's luggage, relieved of its black japanned casings, lay on the floor, with his hat-case and travelling-desk. A pleasant fire burnt in the grate, and a curious abundance of wax-lights, without which Sir Jeykl, such was his peculiarity, could not exist, enlivened the chamber.

As he made his toilet at his homely little dressing-table, he bethought him suddenly, and rang the bell in his shirt-sleeves.

'My letters.'

'Yes, sir.'

And up came a salver well laden with letters, pamphlets, and newspapers, of all shapes and sizes.

'And tell Miss Beatrix I shan't have any tea, and get some brandy from Mrs. Gwynn, and cold water and a tumbler, and let them leave me alone—d'ye see?—and give me that.'

It was a dressing-gown which Tomlin-

son's care had already liberated from its valise, and expanded before the fire.

The Baronet's tastes, as we might see, were simple. He could dine on a bit of roast mutton, and a few glasses of sherry. But his mutton was eight years old, and came all the way from Dartbroke, and his sherry cost more than other men's Madeira, and he now lighted one of those priceless cigars, which so many fellows envied, and inhaled the disembodied aroma of a tobacco which, perhaps, Jove smokes in his easy chair on Olympus, but which I have never smelt on earth, except when Sir Jekyl dispensed the inestimable treasures of his cigar-case.

Now, the Baronet stood over his table, with a weed between his lips, tall in his flowered silk dressing-gown, his open hands shoving apart the pile of letters, as a conjurer at an exhibition spreads his pack of cards.

'Ha! poor little thing!' he murmured, with a sly simper, in a petting tone, as he plucked an envelope, addressed in a

lady's hand, between two fingers, caressingly, from the miscellaneous assortment.

He looked at it, but reserved it as a *bon-bouche* in his waistcoat pocket, and pursued his examination.

There were several from invited guests, who were either coming or not, with the customary expressions, and were tossed together in a little isolated litter for conference with Mrs. Gwynn in the morning.

'Not a line from Pelter and Crowe! the d—d fellows don't waste their ink upon me, except when they furnish their costs. It's a farce paying fellows to look after one's business—no one ever does it but yourself. If those fellows were worth their bread and butter, they'd have known all about this thing, whatever it is, and I'd have had it all *here*, d—— it, to-night.'

Sir Jekyl, it must be confessed, was not quite consistent about this affair of the mysterious young gentleman; for, as we have seen, he himself had a dozen times protested against the possibility of there being anything in it, and now he was

seriously censuring his respectable London attorneys for not furnishing him with the solid contents of this 'wind-bag.'

But it was only his talk that was contradictory. Almost from the moment of his first seeing that young gentleman, on the open way under the sign of the 'Plough,' there lowered a fantastic and cyclopean picture, drawn in smoke or vapour, volcanic and thunderous, all over his horizon, like those prophetic and retrospective pageants with which Doree loves to paint his mystic skies. It was wonderful, and presaged unknown evil ; and only cowed him the more that it baffled analysis and seemed to mock at reason.

'Pretty fellows to keep a look-out ! It's well I can do it for myself—who knows where we're driving to, or what's coming ? Signs enough—whatever they mean—he that runs may read, egad ! Not that there's anything in it *necessarily*. But it's not about drawing and ruins and that stuff—those fellows have come down here. Bosh ! looking after my property. I'd take my

oath they are advised by some lawyer ; and if Pelter and Crowe were sharp, they'd know by whom, and all about it, by Jove !'

Sir Jekyl jerked the stump of his cigar over his shoulder into the grate as he muttered this, looking surlily down on the unprofitable papers that strewed the table.

He stood thinking, with his back to the fire, and looking rather cross and perplexed, and so he sat down and wrote a short letter. It was to Pelter and Crowe, but he began, as he did not care which got it, in his usual way—

'MY DEAR SIR,—I have reason to suspect that those ill-disposed people, who have often threatened annoyance, are at last seriously intent on mischief. You will be good enough, therefore, immediately to set on foot inquiries, here and at the other side of the water, respecting the movements of the D—— family, who, I fancy, are at the bottom of an absurd, though possibly troublesome, demonstration. I don't fear them, of course. But I think you will find that

some members of that family are at present in this country, and disposed to be troublesome. You will see, therefore, the urgency of the affair, and will better know than I where and how to prosecute the necessary inquiries. I do not, of course, apprehend the least *danger* from their machinations; but you have always thought *annoyance* possible; and if any be in store for me, I should rather not have to charge it upon our supineness. You will, therefore, exert your vigilance and activity on my behalf, and be so good as to let me know, at the earliest possible day—which, I think, need not be later than Wednesday next—the result of your inquiries through the old channels. I am a little disappointed, in fact, at not having heard from you before now on the subject.

‘Yours, my dear sir, very sincerely,

‘JEKYL M. MARLOWE.’

Sir Jekyl never swore on paper, and, as a rule, commanded his temper very creditably in that vehicle. But all people who

had dealings with him knew very well that the rich Baronet was not to be trifled with. So, understanding that it was strong enough, he sealed it up for the post-office in the morning, and dropped it into the post-bag, and with it the unpleasant subject for the present.

And now, a little brandy and water, and the envelope in the well-known female hand ; and he laughed a little over it, and looked at himself in the glass with a vaunting complacency, and shook his head playfully at the envelope. It just crossed his sunshine like the shadow of a flying vapour — ‘that cross-grained old Gwynn would not venture to meddle?’ But the envelope was honestly closed, and showed no signs of having been fiddled with.

He made a luxury of this little letter, and read it in his easy chair, with his left leg over the arm, with the fragrant accompaniment of a weed.

‘Jealous, by Jove!’ he ejaculated, in high glee ; ‘little fool, what’s put that ‘in your head?’

‘Poor, little, fluttering, foolish thing!’ sang the Baronet, and then laughed, not cynically, but indulgently rather.

‘How audacious the little fools are upon paper! Egad, it’s a wonder there is not twice as much mischief in the world as actually happens. We must positively burn this little extravagance.

But before doing so he read it over again; then smiling still, he gallantly touched it to his lips, and re-perused it, as he drew another cigar from the treasury of incense which he carried about him. He lighted the note, but did not apply it to his cigar, I am bound to say—partly from a fine feeling, and partly, I am afraid, because he thought that paper spoiled the flavour of his tobacco. So, with a sentimental smile, a gentle shrug, and a sigh of the Laurence Sterne pattern, he converted that dangerous little scrawl into ashes—and he thought, as he inhaled his weed—

‘It is well for you, poor little fanatics, that we men take better care of you than you do of yourselves, sometimes!’

No doubt; and Sir Jekyl supposed he was thinking only of his imprudent little correspondent, although there was another person in whom he was nearly interested, who might have been unpleasantly compromised also, if that document had fallen into other hands.

CHAPTER VI.

SIR JEKYL'S ROOM IS VISITED.

It was near one o'clock. Sir Jekyl yawned and wound his watch, and looked at his bed as if he would like to be in it without the trouble of getting there; and at that moment there came a sharp knock at his door, which startled him, for he thought all his people were asleep by that time.

'Who's there?' he demanded in a loud key.

'It's me, sir, please,' said Donica Gwynn's voice.

'Come in, will you?' cried he; and she entered.

'Are you sick?' he asked.

'No, sir, thank you,' she replied, with a sharp courtesy.

'You look so plaguy pale. Well, I'm glad you're not. But what the deuce can

you want of me at this hour of night? Eh?’

‘It’s only about that room, sir.’

‘Oh, curse the room! Talk about it in the morning. You ought to have been in your bed an hour ago.’

‘So I was, sir; but I could not sleep, sir, for thinking of it.’

‘Well, go back and think of it, if you must. How can I stop you? Don’t be a fool, old Gwynn.’

‘No more I will, sir, please, if I can help, for fools we are, the most on us; but I could not sleep, as I said, for thinking o’t; and so I thought I’d jist put on my things again, and come and try if you, sir, might be still up.’

‘Well, you see I’m up; but I want to get to bed, Gwynn, and not to talk here about solemn bosh; and you must not bore me about that green chamber—do you see?—to-night, like a good old girl; it will do in the morning—won’t it?’

‘So it will, sir; only I could not rest in my bed, until I said, seeing as you mean to

sleep in this room, it would never do. It won't. I can't stand it.'

'Stand what? Egad! it seems to me you're demented, my good old Donica.'

'No, Sir Jekyl' she persisted, with a grim resolution to say out her say. 'You know very well, sir, what's running in my head. You know it's for no good anyone sleeps there. General Lennox, ye say; well an' good. You know well what a loss Mr. Deverell met with in that room in Sir Harry, your father's time.'

'And you slept in it, did not you, and saw something? Eh?'

'Yes, I *did*,' she said, in a sudden fury, with a little stamp on the floor, and a pale, staring frown.

After a breathless pause of a second or two she resumed.

'And you know what your poor lady saw there, and never held up her head again. And well you know, sir, how your father, Sir Harry, on his death-bed, desired it should be walled up, when you were no more than a boy; and your good lady did

the same many a year after, when *she* was a dying. And I tell ye, Sir Jekyl, ye'll sup sorrow yourself yet if you don't. And take a fool's counsel, and shut up that door, and never let no one, friend or foe, sleep there; for well I know it's not for nothing, with your dead father's dying command, and your poor dear lady's dying entreaty against it, that you put anyone to sleep there. I don't know who this General Lennox may be—a good gentleman or a bad; but I'm sure it's for no righteous reason he's to lie there. You would not do it for nothing.'

This harangue was uttered with a volubility, which, as the phrase is, took Sir Jekyl aback. He was angry, but he was also perplexed and a little stunned by the unexpected vehemence of his old house-keeper's assault, and he stared at her with a rather bewildered countenance.

'You're devilish impertinent,' at last he said, with an effort. 'You rant there like a madwoman, just because I like you, and you've been in our family, I believe, since before I was born; you think you may say

what you like. The house is mine, I believe, and I rather think I'll do what I think best in it while I'm here.'

'And you going to sleep in this room!' she broke in. 'What else can it be?'

'You mean — what the devil do you mean?' stammered the Baronet again, unconsciously assuming the defensive.

'I mean you know very well *what*, Sir Jekyl,' she replied.

'It was my father's room, hey?—when I was a boy, as you say. It's good enough for his son, I suppose; and I don't ask *you* to lie in the green chamber.'

'*I'll* be no party, sir, if you please, to any one lying there,' she observed, with a stiff courtesy, and a sudden hectic in her cheek.

'Perhaps you mean because my door's a hundred and fifty feet away from the front of the house, if any mischief should happen, I'm too far away—as others were before me—to prevent it, eh?' said he, with a flurried sneer.

'What I mean, I mean, sir—you ought not; that's all. You won't take it amiss,

Sir Jekyl—I'm an old servant—I'm sorry, sir; but I'a made up my mind what to do.'

' You're not thinking of any folly, surely? You seemed to me always too much afraid, or whatever you call it, of the remembrance, you know, of what you *saw* there—eh?—I don't know, of course, *what*—to speak of it to me. I never pressed you, because you seemed—you know you did—to have a horror; and surely you're not going now to talk among the servants or other people. You can't be far from five-and-thirty years in the family.'

' Four-and-thirty, Sir Jekyl, next April. It's a good while; but I won't see no more o' that; and unless the green chamber be locked up, at the least, and used no more for a bed-room, I'd rather go, sir. Nothing may happen, of course, Sir Jekyl—it's a hundred to one nothing *would* happen; but ye see, sir, I've a feeling about it, sir; and there has been these things ordered by your father that was, and by your poor lady, as makes me feel queer. Nothing being done

accordingly, and I could not rest upon it, for sooner or later it would come to this, and stay I could not. I judge no one—Heaven forbid, Sir Jekyl—oh, no! my own conscience is as much as I can look to; so sir, if you please, so soon as you can suit yourself I'll leave, sir.'

'Stuff! old Gwynn; don't mind talking to-night,' said the Baronet, more kindly than he had spoken before; 'we'll see about it in the morning. Good-night. We must not quarrel about nothing. I was only a school-boy when you came to us, you know.'

But in the morning 'old Gwynn' was resolute. She was actually going, so soon as the master could suit himself. She was not in a passion, nor in a panic, but in a state of gloomy and ominous obstinacy.

'Well, you'll give me a little time, won't you, to look about me?' said the Baronet, peevishly.

'Such is my intention, sir.'

'And see, Gwynn, not a word about that—that green chamber, you know, to Miss Beatrix.'

‘As you please, sir.’

‘Because if you begin to talk, they’ll all think we are haunted.’

‘Whatever you please to order, sir.’

‘And it was not—it was my grandfather, you know, who built it.’

‘Ah, so it was, sir; and Gwynn looked astonished and shook her head, as though cowed by the presence of a master-spirit of evil.

‘One would fancy you saw his ghost, Gwynn; but he was not such a devil as your looks would make him, only a bit wild, and a favourite with the women, Gwynn—always the best judge of merit—hey? Beau Marlowe they called him—the best dressed man of his day. How the devil could such a fellow have any harm in him?’

There is a fine picture, full length, of Beau Marlowe, over the chimneypiece of the great hall of Marlowe. He has remarkably gentlemanlike hands and legs; the gloss is on his silk stockings still. His features are handsome, of that type which we conventionally term aristocratic; high, and smiling

with a Louis-Quatorze insolence. He wears a very fine coat of cut velvet, of a rich, dusky red, the technical name of which I forget. He was of the gilded and powdered youth of his day.

He certainly was a handsome fellow, this builder of the 'green chamber,' and he has not placed his candle under a bushel. He shines in many parts of the old house, and has repeated himself in all manner of becoming suits. You see him, three-quarters, in the parlour, in blue and silver; you meet him in crayon, and again in small oil, oval; and you have him in half a dozen miniatures.

We mention this ancestor chiefly because when his aunt, Lady Mary, left him a legacy, he added the green chamber to the house.

It seems odd that Sir Jekyl, not fifty yet, should have had a grandfather who was a fashionable and wicked notoriety of mature years, and who had built an addition to the family mansion so long as a hundred and thirty years ago. But this gentleman had married late, as rakes sometimes do, and his

son, Sir Harry, married still later—some-where about seventy; having been roused to this uncomfortable exertion by the proprietorial airs of a nephew who was next in succession. To this matrimonial explosion Sir Jekyl owed his entrance and agreeable sojourn upon the earth.

‘I won’t ask you to stay now; you’re in a state. I’ll write to town for Sinnott, as you insist on it; but you won’t leave us in confusion, and you’ll make her *au fait*—won’t you? Give her any hints she may require; and I know I shall have you back again when you cool a little, or at all events when we go back to Dartbroke; for I don’t think I shall like this place.’

So Donica Gwynn declared herself willing to remain till Mrs. Sinnott should arrive from London; and preparations for the reception of guests proceeded with energy.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BARONET PURSUES.

SIR JEKYL MARLOWE was vexed when the letters came, and none from Pelter and Crowe. There are people who expect miracles from their doctors and lawyers, and, in proportion to their accustomed health and prosperity, are unreasonable when anything goes wrong. The Baronet's notion was that the legal firm in question ought to think and even dream of nothing else than his business. It was an impertinence their expecting *him* to think about it. What were *they* there for? He knew that London was a pretty large place, and England still larger; and that it was not always easy to know what everybody was about in either, and still less what each man was doing on the Continent. Pelter and Crowe had some other clients too on their hands,

and had hitherto done very satisfactorily. But here was a serious-looking thing—the first really uncomfortable occurrence which had taken place under his reign—the first opportunity for exhibiting common vigilance—and he ventured to say those fellows did not know these Strangways people were in these kingdoms at all!

Sir Jekyl, though an idle fellow, was a man of action, so he ordered his horse, and rode nine miles to the 'Plough Inn,' where he hoped to see Mr. Strangways again, improve his intimacy, and prevail with the gentlemen to return with him to Marlowe, and spend a fortnight there, when, or the devil was in it, he should contrive to get at the bottom of their plans.

He looked shrewdly in at the open door as he rode up, and halloed for some one to take his horse. The little porch smiled pleasantly, and the two gables and weathercock, in the sunlight; and the farmer on the broad and dingy panel, in his shirt-sleeves, low-crowned, broad-leafed hat, crimson waistcoat, canary-coloured shorts, and

blue stockings, and flaxen wig, was driving his plump horses, and guiding his plough, undiscouraged, as when last he saw him.

Boots and Mrs. Jones came out. Sir Jekyl was too eager to wait to get down; so from the saddle he accosted his buxom hostess, in his usual affable style. The Baronet was not accustomed to be crossed and thwarted as much as, I have been told, men with less money sometimes are; and he showed his mortification in his face when he learned that the two gentlemen had left very early that morning.

‘This morning! Why you said yesterday they would not go till *evening*. Hang it, I wish you could tell it right; and what the d—l do you mean by Strangers? Call him Strangways, can’t you. It’s odd people can’t say names.’

He must have been very much vexed to speak so sharply; and he saw, perhaps, how much he had forgotten himself in the frightened look which good Mrs. Jones turned upon him.

‘I don’t mean you, my good little soul.

It's *their* fault; and where are they gone to? I wanted to ask them both over to Marlowe. Have you a notion?

'They took our horses as far as the "Bell and Horns," at Slowton.' She called shrilly to Boots, 'They're not stoppin' at the "Bell and Horns," sure. Come here, and tell Sir Jekyl Marlowe about Mr. Strangers.'

'You said last night they were going to Awkworth;,' and Sir Jekyl chuckled scornfully, for he was vexed.

'They changed their minds, sir.'

'Well, we'll say so. You're a wonderful fascinating sex. Egad! if you could only carry anything right in your heads for ten minutes, you'd be too charming.' And at this point Boots emerged, and Sir Jekyl continued, addressing him—

'Well, where are the gentlemen who left this morning?' asked he.

'They'll be at the "Bell and Horns," sir.'

'Where's that?'

'Slowton, sir.'

'I know. What hour did they go?'

‘ Eight o’clock, sir.’

‘ Just seven miles. The Sterndale Road, isn’t it ?’

‘ Yes, sir.’

And that was all Boots had to tell.

‘ Will ye please to come in, sir ?’ inquired Mrs. Jones.

‘ No, my good creature. I haven’t time. The old gentleman—what’s his name ?’

‘ I don’t know, sir, please. He calls the young gentleman Guy, and the young gentleman calls him *sir*.’

‘ And both the same name ?’

‘ We calls ’em both Strangers, please, sir.’

‘ I know. Servants, had they ?’

‘ Yes, sir, please. But they sent ’em on.’

‘ Rich—don’t want for money, I suppose. Eh ?’

‘ Oh! plenty money, sir.’

‘ And the servants called the men Strangeways, I suppose, eh ?’

‘ Yes, Sir Jekyl, please ; and so the letters came.’

‘ You never happened to hear any other name ?’

‘No, Sir Jekyl.’

‘*Think.*’

Mrs. Jones did think, but could recall nothing.

‘Nothing with a D?’

‘D, sir! What, sir?’

‘No matter what,’ said the Baronet.

‘No name beginning with D—eh?’

‘No, sir. You don’t think they’re going by a false name?’ inquired the lady, curiously.

‘What the devil puts that in your head? Take care of the law; you must not talk that way, you foolish little rogue.’

‘I did not know, sir,’ timidly answered Mrs. Jones, who saw in Sir Jekyl, the Parliament-man, Deputy-Lieutenant, and Grand Juror, a great oracle of the law.

‘I only wanted to know whether you had happened to hear the name of the elder of the two gentlemen, and could recollect what letter it begins with.’

‘No, sir, please.’

‘So you’ve no more to tell me?’

‘Nothing, sir.’

‘If they come back tell them I rode over to offer them some shooting, and to beg they’d remember to come to Marlowe. You won’t forget?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Do they return here?’

‘I think not, sir.’

‘Well, I believe there’s nothing else,’ and the Baronet looked up reflectively, as if he expected to find a memorandum scribbled on the blue sky, leaning with his hand on the back of his horse. ‘No, nothing. You won’t forget my message, that’s all. Good-bye, my dear.’

And touching the tips of his gloves to his lips, with a smile and a nod he cantered down the Sterndale Road.

He pulled up at the ‘Bell and Horns,’ in the little town of Slowton, but was disappointed. The entire party, servants and all, had taken the train two hours before, at the station three miles away.

Now Sir Jekyl was blooded, and the spirit of the chase stirred within him. So he rode down in his jack-boots, and pulled

up his steaming horse by the station, and he went in and made inquiry.

A man like him is received even at one of these cosmopolitan rallying-points within his own county with becoming awe. The station-master was awfully courteous, and the subaltern officials awfully active and obliging, and the resources of the establishment were at once placed at his sublime disposal. Unhappily, two branch lines converge at this point, causing the usual bustle, and there was consequently a conflict and confusion in the evidence; so that Sir Jekyl, who laughed and chatted agreeably amidst all the reverential zeal that surrounded him, could arrive at nothing conclusive, but leaned to the view that the party had actually gone to Awkworth, only by rail, instead of by road.

Sir Jekyl got on his horse and walked him through the town, uncertain what to do next. This check had cooled him; his horse had his long trot home still. It would not do to follow to Awkworth; to come in, after a four-and-twenty miles' ride, bespattered like a courier, merely to invite

these gentlemen, *vivâ voce*, who had hardly had his note of invitation a score hours. It would be making too much of them with a vengeance.

As he found himself once more riding under the boughs of Marlowe, the early autumnal evening already closing in, Sir Jekyl experienced one of those qualms and sinkings of the heart, which overcome us with a vague anticipation of evil.

The point of the road which he had now gained, commands a view of the old hall of Marlowe, with that projecting addition, and its wide bow-window, every pane of which was now flaming in the sunset light, which indicated the green chamber.

The green chamber! Just at that moment the glare of its broad window flashed with a melancholy and vengeful light upon his brain, busied with painful retrospects and harassing conjecture.

Old Gwynn going away! It was an omen. Marlowe without old Gwynn. Troy without its palladium. Old Gwynn going with something like a denunciation on her

lips! That stupid old woman at Wardlock, too, who really knew nothing about it, undertaking also to prophesy! Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings! There was no sense in it—scarcely articulation. Still it was the croak of the raven—the screech of the owl.

He looked across the gentle slope at the angle of the inauspicious room. Why should old General Lennox be placed within the unhallowed precincts of that chamber? The image of old Gwynn as she gabbled her grim protest on the preceding night, rose before him like a ghost. What business was it of hers, and how could she divine his motives? Still, if there was anything wrong, did not this vehement warning make the matter worse.

An old man he felt himself on a sudden that evening, and for the first time. There was some failure of the electric fire, and a subsidence of the system. His enterprise was gone. Why should he take guilt, if such it were, on his soul for vanity and vexation of spirit? If guilt it were, was it not of a kind inexcusably cold-blooded and

long-headed. Old Gwynn, he did not like to lose you on those terms—just, too, as those unknown actors were hovering at the wing, and about to step upon the stage, this old man and young, who, instinctively he felt, were meditating mischief against him. Mischief—*what*? Such, perhaps, as might shatter the structure of his greatness, and strew its pinnacles in the dust. Perhaps all this gloom was but the depression of a long ride, and still longer fast. But he was accustomed to such occasional strains upon his strength without any such results. Ah, no! He had come within the edge of the shadow of judgment, and its darkness was stealing over him, and its chill touched his heart.

These were the dreamy surmisings with which he rode slowly toward the house, and a few good resolutions in a nebulous state hovered uncomfortably about him.

No letter of any interest had come by the early post, and Sir Jekyl sat down *tête-à-tête* with his pretty daughter, in very dismal spirits, to dinner.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOUSE BEGINS TO FILL.

BEATRIX was fond of her father, who was really a good-natured man, in the common acceptance of the term, that is to say, he had high animal spirits, and liked to see people pleasant about him, and was probably as kind as a tolerably selfish and vicious man can be, and had a liking, moreover, for old faces, which was one reason why he hated the idea of his housekeeper's leaving him. But Beatrix was also a little in awe of him, as girls often are of men of whom they see but little, especially if they have something of the masculine decision of temper.

'You may all go away now,' said the Baronet suddenly to the servants, who had waited at dinner; and when the liveried phantoms had withdrawn, and the door

had closed on the handsome calves of tall and solemn Jenkins, he said—

‘Nothing all day—no adventure, or visitor, Trixie—not a word of news or fun, I dare say?’

‘Nothing—not a creature, papa; only the birds and dogs, and some new music.’

‘Well, it is not much worse than Wardlock, I suppose; but we shall have a gay house soon—at all events plenty of people. Old General Lennox is coming. His nephew, Captain Drayton, is very rich; he will be Lord Tewkesbury—that is, if old Tewkesbury doesn’t marry; and, at all events, he has a very nice property, and does not owe a guinea. You need not look modest, Trixie. You may do just as you please, only I’d be devilish glad you liked one another—there, don’t be distressed, I say; I’ll mention it no more if you don’t like; but he’ll be here in a few days, and you mayn’t think him so bad.’

After this the Baronet drank two glasses of sherry in silence, slowly, and with a gloomy countenance, and then, said he—

‘I think, Trixie, if you were happily placed, I should give the whole thing up. I’m tired of that cursed House of Commons. You can’t imagine what a bore it is, when a fellow does not want anything from them, going down there for their d——d divisions. I’m not fit for the hounds either. I can’t ride as I used—egad! I’m as stiff as a rusty hinge when I get up in the morning. And I don’t much like this place, and I’m tired to death of the other two. When you marry I’ll let them, or, at all events, let them alone. I’m tired of all those servants. I know they’re robbing me, egad! You would not believe what my gardens cost me last year, and, by Jove, I don’t believe all that came to my table was worth two hundred pounds. I’ll have quite a different sort of life. I haven’t any time to myself, looking after all those confounded people one must keep about them. Keepers, and gardeners, and devil knows who beside. I don’t like London half as well as the Continent. I hate dinner-parties, and the season, and all the racket. It doesn’t pay, and

I'm growing old—you'll not mind if I smoke it?' (he held a cigar between his fingers)—'a complaint that doesn't mend by time, you know. Oh! yes, I *am* old, you little rogue. Everybody knows I'm just fifty; and the fact is I'm tired of the whole thing, stock, lock, and barrel; and I believe what little is to be got of life is best had—that is, if you know how to look for it—abroad. A fellow like me who has got places and properties—egad! they expect him to live *pro bono publico*, and not to care or think twopence about himself—at least it comes to that. How is old Gwynn?'

'Very well, I think.'

'And what has she to say for herself; what about things in general?'

'She's not very chatty, poor old Gwynn, and I think she seems a little—just ever so little—cross.'

'So she does—damnably cross. She was always a bit of a vixen, and she isn't improving, poor old thing; but don't be afraid, I like old Donnie for all that, though I

don't think I ever quite understood her, and I don't expect either.' These observations concluded the conversation subsided, and a long silence supervened.

'I wonder who the devil he is,' said the Baronet abruptly, as he threw the stump of his cigar into the fire. 'If it's a fluke, it's as like a miracle as anything I ever saw.'

He recollected that he was talking without an interlocutor, and looked for a moment hesitatingly at his daughter.

'And your grandmamma told you nothing of her adventure in church?'

'No, papa—not a word.'

'It seems to me, women can hold their tongues sometimes, but always in the wrong places.'

Here he shook the ashes of his cigar into the grate.

'Old Granny's a fool—isn't she, Trixie, and a little bit vicious—eh?'

Sir Jekyl put his question dreamily, in a reverie, and it plainly needed no answer. So Beatrix was spared the pain of making

one; which she was glad of, for Lady Alice was good to her after her way, and she was fond of her.

‘We must ask her to come, you know. You write. Say I thought *you* would have a better chance of prevailing. She won’t, you know; and so much the better.’

So as the Baronet rose, and stood gloomily with his back to the fire; the young lady rose also, and ran away to the drawing-room and her desk; and almost at the same moment a servant entered the room, with a letter, which had come by the late post.

Oddly enough, it had the Slowton post-mark.

‘Devilish odd!’ exclaimed Sir Jekyl, scowling eagerly on it; and seating himself hastily on the side of a chair, he broke it open and read at the foot the autograph, ‘Guy Strangways.’

It was with the Napoleonic thrill, ‘I have them, then, these English!’ that Sir Jekyl read, in a gentlemanlike, rather foreign hand, a ceremonious and compli-

mentary acceptance of his invitation to Marlowe, on behalf both of the young man and of his elder companion. His correspondent could not say exactly, as their tour was a little desultory, where a note would find them; but as Sir Jekyl Marlowe had been so good as to permit them to name a day for their visit, they would say so and so.

‘Let me see—what day’s this—why, that will be’—he was counting with the tips of his fingers, pianowise, on the table—‘Wednesday week, eh?’ and he tried it over again with nature’s ‘Babbage’s machine,’ and of course with an inflexible result. ‘Wednesday week—Wednesday,’ and he heaved a great sigh, like a man with a load taken off him.

‘Well, I’m devilish glad. I hope nothing will happen to stop them now. It can’t be a *ruse* to get quietly off the ground? No—that would be doing it too fine.’ He rang the bell.

‘I want Mrs. Gwynn.’

The Baronet’s spirit revived within him, and he stood erect, with his back to the

fire, and his hands behind him, and when the housekeeper entered, he received her with his accustomed smile.

‘Glad to see you, Donnie. Glass of sherry? No—well, sit down—won’t take a chair!—why’s that? Well, we’ll be on pleasanter terms soon—you’ll find it’s really no choice of mine. I can’t help using that stupid green room. Here are two more friends coming—not till Wednesday week though—two gentlemen. You may put them in rooms beside one another—wherever you like—only not in the garrets, of course. *Good* rooms, do ye see.’

‘And what’s the gentlemen’s names, please, Sir Jekyl,’ inquired Mrs. Gwynn.

‘Mr. Strangways, the young gentleman; and the older, as well as I can read it, is Mr. Varbarriere.’

‘Thank ye, sir.’

The housekeeper having again declined the kindly distinction of a glass of sherry, withdrew.

In less than a week guests began to assemble, and in a few days more old Marlowe

Hall began to wear a hospitable and pleasant countenance.

The people were not, of course, themselves all marvels of agreeability. For instance, Sir Paul Blunket, the great agriculturist and eminent authority on liquid manures, might, as we all know, be a little livelier with advantage. He is short and stolid; he wears a pale blue muslin neck-handkerchief with a white stripe, carefully tied. His countenance, I am bound to say, is what some people would term heavy—it is frosty, painfully shaven, and shines with a glaze of transparent soap. He has small, very light blue round eyes, and never smiles. A joke always strikes him with unaffected amazement and suspicion. Laughter he knows may imply ridicule, and he may himself possibly be the subject of it. He waits till it subsides, and then talks on as before on subjects which interest him.

Lady Blunket, who accompanies him everywhere, though not tall, is stout. She is delicate, and requires nursing; and, for so confirmed an invalid, has a surprising

appetite. John Blunket, the future baronet, is in the Diplomatic Service, I forget exactly where, and by no means young; and lean Miss Blunket, at Marlowe with her parents, though known to be older than her brother, is still quite a girl, and giggles with her partner at dinner, and is very *naïve* and animated, and sings arch little chansons discordantly to the guitar, making considerable play with her eyes, which are black and malignant.

This family, though neither decorative nor entertaining, being highly respectable and ancient, make the circuit of all the good houses in the county every year, and are wonderfully little complained of. Hither also they had brought in their train pretty little Mrs. Maberly, a cousin, whose husband, the Major, was in India—a garrulous and good-humoured siren, who smiled with pearly little teeth, and blushed easily.

At Marlowe had already assembled several single gentlemen too. There was little Tom Linnett, with no end of money and spirits, very good-natured, addicted to sentiment,

and with a taste for practical joking too, and a very popular character notwithstanding.

Old Dick Doocey was there also, a colonel long retired, and well known at several crack London clubs; tall, slight, courtly, agreeable, with a capital elderly wig, a little deaf, and his handsome high nose a little reddish. Billy Cobb—too, a gentleman who could handle a gun, and knew lots about horses and dogs—had arrived.

Captain Drayton had arrived: a swell, handsome, cleverish, and impertinent, and, as young men with less reason will be, egotistical. He would not have admitted that he had deigned to make either plan or exertion with that object, but so it happened that he was placed next to Miss Beatrix, whom he carelessly entertained with agreeable ironies, and anecdotes, and sentiments poetic and perhaps a little vapid. On the whole, a young gentleman of intellect, as well as wealth and expectations, and who felt, not unnaturally, that he was overpowering. Miss Beatrix, though not

quite twenty, was *not* overpowered, however, neither was her heart preoccupied. There was, indeed, a shadow of another handsome young gentleman—only a shadow, in a different style—dark, and this one light; and she heart-whole, perhaps fancy-free, amused, delighted, the world still new and only begun to be explored. One London season she had partly seen, and also made her annual tour twice or thrice of all the best county-houses, and so was not nervous among her peers.

CHAPTER IX.

DINNER.

OF the two guests destined for the green chamber, we must be permitted to make special mention.

General and Lady Jane Lennox had come. The General, a tall, soldierlike old gentleman, who held his bald and pink, but not very high forehead, erect, with great grey projecting moustache, twisted up at the corners, and bristling grey eyebrows to correspond, over his frank round grey eyes—a gentleman with a decidedly military bearing, imperious but kindly of aspect, good-natured, prompt, and perhaps a little stupid.

Lady Jane—everybody knows Lady Jane—the most admired of London belles for a whole season. Golden brown hair, and what young Thrumly of the Guards called,

in those exquisite lines of his, 'slumbrous eyes of blue,' under very long lashes and exquisitely-traced eyebrows, such brilliant lips and teeth, and such a sweet oval face, and above all, so beautiful a figure and wonderful a waist, might have made one marvel how a lady so well qualified for a title, with noble blood, though but a small *dot*, should have wrecked herself on an old general, though with eight thousand a year. But there were stories and reasons why the simple old officer, just home from India, who knew nothing about London lies, and was sure of his knighthood, and it was said of a baronetage, did not come amiss.

There were people who chose to believe these stories, and people who chose to discredit them. But General Lennox never had even heard them; and certainly, it seemed nobody's business to tell him now. It might not have been quite pleasant to tell the General. He was somewhat muddled of apprehension, and slow in everything but fighting; and having all the old-fashioned notions about hair-trig-

gers, and 'ten paces,' as the proper ordeal in a misunderstanding, people avoided uncomfortable topics in his company, and were for the most part disposed to let well alone.

Lady Jane had a will and a temper; but the General held his ground firmly. As brave men as he have been henpecked; but somehow he was not of the temperament which will submit to be bullied even by a lady; and as he was indulgent and easily managed, that tactique was the line she had adopted. Lady Jane was not a riant beauty. Luxurious, funeste, sullen, the mystery and melancholy of her face was a relief among the smirks and simpers of the ball-room, and the novelty of the style interested for a time even the *blazé* men of twenty seasons.

Several guests of lesser note there were; and the company had sat down to dinner, when the Reverend Dives Marlowe, rector of the succulent family living of Queen's Chorleigh, made his appearance in the parlour, a little to the surprise of his

brother the Baronet, who did not expect him quite so soon.

The Rector was a tall man and stalwart, who had already acquired that convex curve which indicates incipient corpulence, and who, though younger than his brother, looked half a dozen years his senior. With a broad bald forehead, projecting eyebrows, a large coarse mouth, and with what I may term the rudiments of a double chin—altogether an ugly and even repulsive face, but with no lack of energy and decision—one looked with wonder from this gross, fierce, clerical countenance to the fine outlines and proportions of the Baronet's face, and wondered how the two men could really be brothers.

The cleric shook his brother's hand in passing, and smiled and nodded briefly here and there, right and left, and across the table his recognition, and chuckled a harsher chuckle than his brother's, as he took his place, extemporized with the quiet legerdemain of a consummate butler by Ridley ;

and answered in a brisk, abrupt voice the smiling inquiries of friends.

‘Hope you have picked up an appetite on the way, Dives,’ said the Baronet. Dives generally carried a pretty good one about with him. ‘Good air on the way, and pretty good mutton here, too—my friends tell me.’

‘Capital air—capital mutton — capital fish,’ replied the ecclesiastic, in a brisk, business-like tone, while being a man of nerve, he got some fish, although that esculent had long vanished, and even the entrées had passed into history, and called over his shoulder for the special sauces which his soul loved, and talked, and compounded his condiments with energy and precision.

The Rector was a shrewd and gentleman-like, though not a very pretty, apostle, and had made a sufficient toilet before presenting himself, and snapped and gobbled his fish, in a glossy, single-breasted coat, with standing collar; a ribbed silk waistcoat, covering his ample chest, almost like a cassock, and one of those transparent

muslin dog-collars which High Churchmen affect.

‘Well, Dives,’ cried Sir Jekyl, ‘how do the bells ring? I gave them a chime, poor devils’ (this was addressed to Lady Blunket at his elbow), ‘by way of compensation, when I sent them Dives.’

‘Pretty well; they don’t know how to pull ’em, I think, quite,’ answered Dives, dabbing a bit of fish in a pool of sauce, and punching it into shape with his bit of bread. ‘And how is old Parson Moulders?’ continued the Baronet, pleasantly.

‘I haven’t heard,’ said the Rector, and drank off half his glass of hock.

‘Can’t believe it, Dives. Here’s Lady Blunket knows. He’s the aged incumbent of Droughton. A devilish good living in my gift; and of course you’ve been asking how the dear old fellow is.’

‘I haven’t, upon my word; not but I ought, though,’ said the Rev. Dives Marlowe, as if he did not see the joke.

‘He’s very severe on you,’ simpered fat Lady Blunket, faintly, across the table, and

subsided with a little cough, as if the exertion hurt her.

‘Is he? Egad! I never perceived it.’ The expression was not clerical, but the speaker did not seem aware he had uttered it. ‘How dull I must be! Have you ever been in this part of the world before, Lady Jane?’ continued he, turning towards General Lennox’s wife, who sat beside him.

‘I’ve been to Wardlock, a good many years ago; but that’s a long way from this, and I almost forget it,’ answered Lady Jane, in her languid, haughty way.

‘In what direction is Wardlock,’ she asked of Beatrix, raising her handsome, unfathomable eyes for a moment.

‘You can see it from the bow-window of your room—I mean that oddly-shaped hill to the right.’

‘That’s from the green chamber,’ said the Rector. ‘I remember the view. Isn’t it ’

‘Yes. They have put Lady Jane in the haunted room,’ said Beatrix, smiling and nodding to Lady Jane.

‘And what fool, pray, told you that,’ said the Baronet, perhaps just a little sharply.

‘Old Gwynn seems to think so,’ answered Beatrix, with the surprised and frightened look of one who fancies she has made a blunder. ‘I—of course we know it is all folly.’

‘You must not say that—you shan’t disenchant us,’ said Lady Jane. ‘There’s nothing I should so like as a haunted room; its a charming idea—isn’t it, Arthur?’ she inquired of the General.

‘We had a haunted room in my quarters at Puttypoor,’ observed the General, twiddling the point of one of his moustaches. ‘It was the store-room where we kept pickles, and olives, and preserves, and plates, and jars, and glass bottles. And every night there was a confounded noise there; jars, and bottles, and things tumbling about, made a devil of a row, you know. I got Smith—my servant Smith, you know, a very respectable man—uncommon steady fellow, Smith—to watch, and he did. We kept the door closed, and Smith outside. I gave him half-a-crown a night and his supper—

very well for Smith, you know. Sometimes he kept a light, and sometimes I made him sit in the dark with matches ready.

‘Was not he very much frightened?’ asked Beatrix, who was deeply interested in the ghost.

‘I hope you gave him a smelling-bottle?’ inquired Tom Linnett, with a tender concern.

Well, I don’t suppose he was,’ said the General, smiling good-humouredly on pretty Beatrix, while he loftily passed by the humorous inquiry of the young gentleman. ‘He was, in fact, on dooty, you know; and there were occasional noises and damage done in the store-room—in fact, just the same as if Smith was not there.’

‘Oh, possibly Smith himself among the bottles!’ suggested Linnett.

‘He always got in as quick as he could,’ continued the General; ‘but could not see anyone. Things were broken—bottles sometimes.’

‘How very strange,’ exclaimed Beatrix, charmed to hear the tale of wonder.

‘We could not make it out; it was very odd, you know,’ resumed the narrator.

‘*You* weren’t frightened, General?’ inquired Linnett.

‘*No*, sir,’ replied the General, who held that a soldier’s courage, like a lady’s reputation, was no subject for jesting, and conveyed that sentiment by a slight pause, and a rather alarming stare from under his fierce grey eyebrows. ‘No one was frightened, I suppose; we were all men in the house, sir.’

‘At home, I think, we’d have suspected a rat or a cat,’ threw in the Rector.

‘Some did, sir,’ replied the General; ‘and we made a sort of a search; but it wasn’t. There was a capital tiled floor, not a hole you could put a ramrod in; and no cat, neither—high windows, grated; and the door always close; and every now and then something broken by night.’

‘Delightful! That’s what Mrs. Crowe, in that charming book, you know, “*The Night Side of Nature*,” calls, I forget the name; but it’s a German word, I think

—the noisy ghost it means. Racket—something, isn't it, Beet?' (the short for Beatrix). 'I do so *devour* ghosts!' cried sharp old Miss Blunket, who thought Beatrix's enthusiasm became her; and chose to exhibit the same pretty fanaticism.

'I didn't *say* it was a ghost, mind ye,' interposed the General, with a grave regard for his veracity; 'only we were puzzled a bit. There *was* something there we all knew; and something that could reach up to the high shelves, and break things on the floor too, you see. We had been watching, off and on, I think, some three or four weeks. and I heard one night, early, a row in the store-room—a devil of a row it was; but Smith was on dooty, as we used to say, that night, so I left it to him; and he could have sung out, you know, if he wanted help—poor fellow! And in the morning my native fellow told me that poor Smith was dead in the store-room; and, egad! so he was, poor fellow!'

'How awful!' exclaimed Beatrix.

And Miss Blunket, in girlish horror,

covered her fierce black eyes with her lank fingers.

‘A bite of a cobra, by Jove! above the knee, and another on the hand. A fattish fellow, poor Smith, the natives say they go faster—that sort of man; but no one can stand a fair bite of a cobra—I defy you. We killed him after.’

‘What! *Smith*?’ whispered Linnett in his neighbour’s ear.

‘He lay in a basket; you never saw such a brute,’ continued the General; ‘he was very near killing another of my people.’

‘So *there* was your ghost?’ said Doocey, archly.

‘Worse than a ghost,’ observed Sir Paul Blunket.

‘A dooced deal,’ acquiesced the General, gravely.

‘You’re very much annoyed with vermin out there in India?’ remarked Sir Paul.

‘So we are, sir,’ agreed the General.

‘It’s very hard, you see, to meet with a genuine ghost, Miss Marlowe; they generally turn out impostors,’ said Doocey.

‘I should like to think my room was haunted,’ said Lady Jane.

‘Oh! *dear* Lady Jane, how *can* you be so *horribly* brave?’ cried Miss Blunket.

‘We have no cobras here, at all events,’ said Sir Paul, nodding to Sir Jekyl, with the gravity becoming such a discovery.

‘No,’ said Sir Jekyl, gloomily. I suppose he was thinking of something else.

The ladies now floated away like summer clouds, many-tinted, golden, through the door, which Doocey held gracefully open; and the mere mortals of the party, the men, stood up in conventional adoration, while the divinities were translated, as it were, before their eyes, and hovered out of sight and hearing into the resplendent regions of candelabra and mirrors, nectar and ambrosia, tea and plum-cake, and clouds of silken tapestry, and the musical tinkling of their own celestial small-talk.

CHAPTER X.

INQUIRIES HAVE BEEN MADE BY MESSRS.
PELTSER AND CROWE.

BEFORE repairing to bed, such fellows, young or old, as liked a talk and a cigar, and some sherry—or, by'r lady, brandy and water—were always invited to accompany Sir Jekyl to what he termed the back settlement, where he bivouacked among deal chairs and tables, with a little camp-bed, and plenty of wax candles and a brilliant little fire.

Here, as the Baronet smoked in his homely little 'hut,' as he termed it, after his guests had dispersed to their bed-rooms, the Rev. Dives Marlowe that night knocked at the door, crying, 'May I come in, Jekyl?'

'Certainly, dear Dives.'

'You really mean it?'

'Never was parson so welcome.'

'By Jove!' said the Rector, 'it's later

than I thought—you're sure I don't bore you.'

'Not sure, but you *may*, Dives,' said Sir Jekyl, observing his countenance, which was not quite pleasant. 'Come in, and say your say. Have a weed, old boy?'

'Well, well—a—we're alone. I don't mind—I don't generally—not that there's any harm; but some people, very good people, object—the weaker brethren, you know.'

'Consummate asses, we call them; but weaker brethren, as you say, does as well.'

The Rector was choosing and sniffing out a cigar to his heart's content.

'Milk for babes, you know,' said the Rector, making his preparations. 'Strong meats'——

'And strong cigars; but you'll find these as mild as you please. Here's a match.'

The Rector sat down, with one foot on the fender, and puffed away steadily, looking into the fire; and his brother, at the opposite angle of the fender, employed himself similarly.

'Fine old soldier, General Lennox,' said

the cleric, at last. 'What stay does he make with you?'

'As long as he pleases. Why?' said Sir Jekyl.

'Only he said something to-night in the drawing-room about having to go up to town to attend a Board of the East India Directors,' answered the parson.

'Oh, did he?'

'And I think he said the day after to-morrow. I thought he told you, perhaps.'

'Upon my life I can't say—perhaps he did,' said Sir Jekyl, carelessly. 'Lennox is a wonderful fine old fellow, as you say, but a little bit slow, you know; and his going or staying would not make very much difference to me.'

'I thought he told his story pretty well at dinner—that haunted room and the cobra, you remember,' said the Rector.

The Baronet grunted an assent, and nodded, without removing his cigar. The brothers conducted their conversation, not looking on one another, but each steadily into the grate.

‘And, apropos of haunted rooms, Lady Jane mentioned they are in the green chamber,’ continued the Rector.

‘Did she? I forgot—so they are, I think,’ answered the Baronet.

Here they puffed away in silence for some time.

‘You know, Jekyl, about that room? Poor Amy, when she was dying, made you promise—and you did promise, you know—and she got me to promise to remind you to shut it up; and then, you know, my father wished the same,’ said the Rector.

‘Come, Dives, my boy, somebody has been poking you up about this. You have been hearing from my old mother-in-law, or talking to her, the goosey old shrew!’

‘Upon my honour!’ said the Rector, solemnly resting the wrist of his cigar-hand upon the black silk vest, and motioning his cheroot impressively, ‘you are quite mistaken. One syllable I have not heard from Lady Alice upon the subject, nor, indeed, upon any other, for two months or more.’

‘Come, come, Dives, old fellow, you’ll not

come the inspired preacher over me. Somebody's been at you, and if it was not poor old Lady Alice it was stupid old Gwynn. You need not deny it—ha! ha! ha! your speaking countenance proclaims it, my dear boy.'

'I'm not thinking of denying it. Old Donica Gwynn did write to me,' said the pastor.

'Let me see her note?' said Sir Jekyl.

'I threw it in the fire; but I assure you there was nothing in it that would or could have vexed you. Nothing, in fact, but an appeal to me to urge you to carry out the request of poor Amy, and not particularly well spelt or written, and certainly not the sort of thing I should have liked anyone to see but ourselves, so I destroyed it as soon as I had read it.'

'I'd like to have known what the plague could make you come here two days—of course I'm glad to see you—two days before you intended, and what's running in your mind.'

'Nothing in particular—nothing, I assure

you, but this. I'm certain it will be talked about—it will—the women will talk. You'll find there will be something very unpleasant; take my advice, my dear Jekyl, and just do as you promised. My poor father wished it, too—in fact, directed it, and—and it ought to be done—you know it ought.'

'Upon my soul I know no such thing. I'm to pull down my house, I suppose, for a sentiment? What the plague harm does the room do anybody? It doesn't hurt me, nor you.'

'It may hurt *you* very much, Jekyl.'

'I can't see it; but if it does, that's my affair,' said Sir Jekyl, sulkily.

'But, my dear Jekyl, surely you ought to consider your promise.'

'Come, Dives, no preaching. It's a very good trade, I know, and I'll do all I can for you in it; but I'm no more to be humbugged by a sermon than you are. Come! How does the dog I sent you get on? Have you bottled the pipe of port yet, and how is old Moulders, as I asked you at dinner? Talk

of shooting, eating and drinking, and making merry, and getting up in your profession—by-the-by, the Bishop is to be here in a fortnight, so manage to stay and meet him. Talk of the port, and the old parson's death, and the tithes small and great, and I'll hear you with respect, for I shall know you are speaking of things you understand, and take a real interest in; but pray don't talk any more about that stupid old room, and the stuff and nonsense these women connect with it; and, once for all, believe me when I say I have no notion of making a fool of myself by shutting up or pulling down a room which we want to use—I'll do no such thing,' and Sir Jekyl clenched the declaration with an oath, and chucking the stump of his cigar into the fire, stood up with his back to it, and looked down on his clerical Mentor, the very impersonation of ungodly obstinacy.

'I had some more to say, Jekyl, but I fancy you don't care to hear it.'

'Not a word of it,' replied the Baronet.

'That's enough for me,' said the parson,

with a wave of his hand, like a man who has acquitted himself of a duty.

‘And how soon do you say the Bishop is to be here?’ he inquired, after a pause.

‘About ten days, or *less*—egad! I forget,’ answered Sir Jekyl, still a good deal ruffled.

The Rector stood up also, and hummed something like ‘Rule Britannia’ for a while. I am afraid he was thinking altogether of himself by this time, and suddenly recollecting that he was not in his own room, he wished his brother good-night, and departed.

Sir Jekyl was vexed. There are few things so annoying, when one has made up his mind to a certain course, as to have the unavowed misgivings and evil auguries of one’s own soul aggravated by the vain but ominous dissuasions of others.

‘I wish they’d keep their advice to themselves. What hurry need there be? Do they want me to blow up the room with old Lennox and his wife in it? I don’t care twopence about it. It’s a gloomy place.’ Sir Jekyl was charging the accidental state of his own spirits upon the aspect of the place,

which was really handsome and cheerful, though antique.

‘They’re all in a story, the fools! What is it to me? I don’t care if I never saw it again. They may pull it down after Christmas, if they like, for *me*. And Dives, too, the scamp, talking pulpit. He thinks of nothing but side-dishes and money. As worldly a dog as there is in England!’

Jekyl Marlowe could get angry enough on occasion, but he was not prone to sour tempers and peevish humours. There was, however, just now, something to render him uncomfortable and irritable, and that was that his expected guests, Mr. Guy Strangways and M. Varbarriere had not kept tryste. The day appointed for their visit had come and gone, and no appearance made. In an ordinary case a hundred and fifty accidents might account for such a miscarriage; but there was in this the unavowed specialty which excited and sickened his mind, and haunted his steps and his bed with suspicions; and he fancied he could understand a little how Herod felt when he was mocked of the wise men.

Next morning's post-bag brought Sir Jekyl two letters, one of which relieved, and the other rather vexed him, though not very profoundly. This latter was from his mother-in-law, Lady Alice, in reply to his civil note, and much to his surprise, accepting his invitation to Marlowe.

‘Cross-grained old woman! She's coming, for no reason on earth but to vex me. It shan't though. I'll make her most damnably welcome. We'll amuse her till she has not a leg to stand on; we'll take her an excursion every second day, and bivouac on the side of a mountain, or in the bottom of a wet valley. We'll put the young ponies to the phaeton, and Dutton shall run them away with her. I'll get up theatricals, and balls, and concerts; and I'll have breakfast at nine instead of ten. I'll entertain her with a vengeance, egad! We'll see who'll stand it longest.’

A glance at the foot of the next letter, which was a large document, on a bluish sheet of letter-paper, showed him what he expected, the official autograph of Messrs. Pelter and Crowe; it was thus expressed—

‘ MY DEAR SIR JEKYL MARLOWE,—

‘ Pursuant to your’s of the —th, and in accordance with the instructions therein contained, we have made inquiries, as therein directed, in all available quarters, and have received answers to our letters, and trust that the copies thereof, and the general summary of the correspondence, which we hope to forward by this evening’s post, will prove satisfactory to you. The result seems to us clearly to indicate that your information has not been well founded, and that there has been no movement in the quarter to which your favour refers, and that no member—at all events no prominent member—of that family is at present in England. In further execution of your instructions, as conveyed in your favour as above, we have, through a reliable channel, learned that Messrs. Smith, Rumsey, and Snagg, have nothing in the matter of Deverell at present in their office. Nor has there been, we are assured, any correspondence from or on the part of any of those clients for the last five terms or more. Notwithstanding, therefore, the coincidence of the date of your

letter with the period to which, on a former occasion, we invited your attention, as indicated by the deed of 1809'—

'What the plague is that?' interpolated Sir Jekyl. 'They want me to write and ask, and pop it down in the costs;' and after a vain endeavour to recall it, he read the passage over again with deliberate emphasis.

'Notwithstanding, therefore, the coincidence of the date of your letter with the period to which, on a former occasion, we invited your attention, as indicated by the deed of 1809, we are clear upon the evidence of the letters, copies of which will be before you as above by next post, that there is no ground for supposing any unusual activity on the part or behalf of the party or parties to whom you have referred.

'Awaiting your further directions,

'I have the honour to remain,

'My dear Sir Jekyl Marlowe,

'Your obedient servant,

'N. CROWE.

'For PELTER and CROWE.

'Sir Jekyl Marlowe, Bart.

'Marlowe, Old Swayton.'

When Sir Jekyl read this he felt all on a sudden a dozen years younger. He snapped his fingers, and smiled, in spite of himself. He could hardly bring himself to acknowledge, even in soliloquy, how immensely he was relieved. The sun shone delightfully : and his spirits returned quite brightly. He would have liked to cricket, to ride a steeple-chase—anything that would have breathed and worked him well, and given him a fair occasion for shouting and cheering.

CHAPTER XI.

OLD GRYSTON BRIDGE.

VERY merry was the Baronet at the social breakfast-table, and the whole party very gay, except those few whose natures were sedate or melancholic.

‘A tremendous agreeable man, Sir Jekyl—don’t you think so, Jennie?’ said General Lennox to his wife, as he walked her slowly along the terrace at the side of the house.

‘I think him intolerably noisy, and sometimes absolutely vulgar,’ answered Lady Jane, with a languid disdain, which conveyed alike her estimate of her husband’s discernment and of Sir Jekyl’s merits.

‘Well, I thought he was agreeable. Some of his jokes I think, indeed, had not much sense in them. But sometimes I don’t see a witty thing as quick as cleverer fellows

do, and they were all laughing, except you ; and I don't think you like him, Jennie.'

. 'I don't dislike him. I dare say he's a very worthy soul ; but he gives me a headache.'

'He *is* a little bit noisy, maybe. Yes, he certainly *is*,' acquiesced the honest General, who, in questions of taste and nice criticism, was diffident of his own judgment, and leaned to his wife's. But I thought he was rather a pleasant fellow. I'm no great judge ; but I like to see fellows laughing, and that sort of thing. It looks good-humoured, don't you think ?'

'I hate good-humour,' said Lady Jane.

The General, not knowing exactly what to say next, marched by her side in silence, till Lady Jane let go his arm, and sat down on the rustic seat which commands so fine a view, and, leaning back, eyed the landscape with a dreamy indolence, as if she was going to 'cut' it.

The General scanned it with a military eye, and his reconnoitring glance discerned, coming up the broad walk at his right, their

host, with pretty Mrs. Maberly on his arm, doing the honours plainly very agreeably.

On seeing the General and Lady Jane, he smiled, quickened his pace, and raised his hat.

‘So glad we have found you,’ said he. ‘Charming weather, isn’t it? *You* must determine, Lady Jane, what’s to be done to-day. There are two things you really ought to see—Gryston Bridge and Hazelden Castle. I assure you the great London artists visit both for studies. We’ll take our luncheon there, it’s such a warm, bright day—that is, if you like the plan—and, which do you say?’

‘My husband always votes for me. What does Mrs. Maberly say?’ and Lady Jane looked in her face with one of her winning smiles.

‘Yes, what does Mrs. Maberly say?’ echoed the General, gallantly.

‘So you won’t advise?’ said the Baronet, leaning toward Lady Jane, a little reproachfully.

‘I won’t advise,’ she echoed, in her indolent way.

‘Which is the best?’ inquired Mrs. Maberly, gleefully. ‘What a charming idea!’

‘For my part, I have a headache, you know, Arthur—I told you, dear; and I shall hardly venture a long excursion, I think. What do you advise to-day?’

‘Well, I think it might do you good—hey? What do *you* say, Sir Jekyl?’

‘So very sorry to hear Lady Jane is suffering; but I really think your advice, General Lennox—it’s so very fine and mild—and I think it might amuse Lady Jane;’ and he glanced at the lady, who, however, wearing her bewitching smile, was conversing with Mrs. Maberly about a sweet little white dog, with long ears and a blue ribbon, which had accompanied her walk from the house.

‘Well, dear, Sir Jekyl wants to know. What do you say?’ inquired the General.

‘Oh, pray arrange as you please. I dare say I can go. It’s all the same,’ answered Lady Jane, without raising her eyes from silvery little Bijou, on whom she bestowed her unwonted smiles and caresses.

‘ You belong to Beatrix, you charming little fairy—I’m sure you do; and is not it very wicked to go out with other people without leave, you naughty little truant?’

‘ You must not attack her so. She really loves Beatrix; and though she has come out just to take the air with me, I don’t think she cares twopence about me; and I know I don’t about her.’

‘ What a cruel speech!’ cried pretty Mrs. Maberly, with a laugh that showed her exquisite little teeth.

‘ The *fact* is cruel—if you will—not the speech—for she can’t hear it,’ said Sir Jekyl, patting Bijou.

‘ So they *act* love to your face, poor little dog, and say what they please of you behind your back,’ murmured Lady Jane, soothingly, to little Bijou, who wagged his tail and wriggled to her feet. ‘ Yes, they do, poor little dog!’

‘ Well, I shall venture—may I? I’ll order the carriages at one. And we’ll say Gryston Bridge,’ said Sir Jekyl, hesitating

notwithstanding, inquiry plainly in his countenance.

‘Sir Jekyl’s waiting, dear,’ said General Lennox, a little imperiously.

‘I really don’t care. *Yes, then,*’ she said, and, getting up, she took the General’s arm and walked away, leaving Mrs. Maberly and her host to their *tête-à-tête*.

Gryston Bridge is one of the prettiest scenes in that picturesque part of the country. A river slowly winds its silvery way through the level base of a beautifully irregular valley. No enclosure breaks the dimpling and undulating sward—for it is the common of Gryston—which rises in soft pastoral slopes at either side, forming the gentle barriers of the valley, which is closed in at the further end by a bold and Alpine hill, with a base rising purple and dome-like from the plain; and in this perspective the vale of Gryston diverges, and the two streams, which at its head unite to form the slow-flowing current of the Greet, are lost to sight. Trees of nature’s planting here and there overhang its stream, and others,

solitarily or in groups, stud the hill-sides and the soft green plain. A strange row of tall, grey stones, Druidic or monumental, of a bygone Cyclopean age, stand up, time-worn and mysterious, on a gentle slope, with a few bending thorn and birch trees beside them, in the near distance; and in the foreground, the steep, Gothic bridge of Gretford, or Gryston, spans the river, with five tall arches, and a loop-holed gatehouse, which once guarded the pass, now roofless and ruined.

In this beautiful and sequestered scene the party from Marlowe had loitered away that charming afternoon. The early sunset had been rapidly succeeded by twilight, and the moon had surprised them. The servants were packing up hampers of plates and knives and forks, and getting the horses to for the return to Marlowe; while, in the early moonlight a group stood upon the bridge, overlooking from the battlement the sweet landscape in its changing light.

Sir Jekyl could see that Captain Drayton was by Beatrix's side, and concluded,

rightly, I have no doubt, that his conversation was tinted by the tender lights of that romantic scenery.

‘The look back on this old bridge from those Druidic stones there by moonlight is considered very fine. It is no distance—hardly four hundred steps from this—although it looks so misty,’ said the Baronet to Lady Jane, who leaned on his arm. ‘Suppose we make a little party, will you venture?’

I suppose the lady acquiesced, for Sir Jekyl ordered that the carriages should proceed round by the road, and take them up at the point where these Druidic remains stand.

The party who ventured this little romantic walk over the grass, were General Lennox, in charge of the mature Miss Blunket, who loved a frolic with all her girlish heart; Sir Jekyl, with Lady Jane upon his arm; and Captain Drayton, who escorted Beatrix. Marching gaily, in open column, as the General would have said, they crossed the intervening hollow, and

reached the hillock, on which stand these ungainly relics of a bygone race; and up the steep bank they got, each couple as best they could. Sir Jekyl and Lady Jane, for he knew the ground, by an easy path, were first to reach the upper platform.

Sir Jekyl, I dare say, was not very learned about the Druids, and I can't say exactly what he was talking about, when on a sudden he arrested both his step and his sentence, for on one of these great prostrate stones which strew that summit, he saw standing, not a dozen steps away, well illuminated by the moon, the figure of that very Guy Strangways, whom he so wished and hated to see—whom he had never beheld without such strange sensations, and had not expected to see again.

The young man took no note of them apparently. He certainly did not recognise Sir Jekyl, whose position placed his face in the shade, while that of Mr. Strangways was full in the white light of the moon.

They had found him almost in the act of descending from his pedestal; and he was

gone in a few moments, before the Baronet had recovered from his surprise.

The vivid likeness which he bore to a person whom the Baronet never wished to think of, and the suddenness of his appearance and his vanishing, had reimpressed him with just the same secret alarms and misgivings as when first he saw him; and the serene confidence induced by the letter of Messrs. Pelter and Crowe was for a moment demolished. He dropped Lady Jane's arm, and forgetting his chivalry, strode to the brow of the hillock, over which the mysterious young man had disappeared. He had lost sight of him, but he emerged in a few seconds, about fifty yards away, from behind a screen of thorn, walking swiftly toward the road close by, on which stood a chaise, sharp in the misty moonlight.

Just in time to prevent his shouting after the figure, now on the point of re-entering the vehicle, he recollected and checked himself. Confound the fellows, if they did not appreciate his hospitality, should he run

after them; or who were they that he should care a pin about them? Had he not Pelter and Crowe's letter? And suppose he did overtake and engage the young rogue in talk, what could he expect but a parcel of polite lies. Certainly, under the circumstances, pursuit would have been specially undignified; and the Baronet drew himself up on the edge of the eminence, and cast a haughty half-angry look after the young gentleman, who was now stepping into the carriage; and suddenly he recollected how very ill he had treated Lady Jane, and he hastened to rejoin her.

But Sir Jekyl, in that very short interval, had lost something of his spirits. The sight of that young man had gone far to undo the tranquillising effect of his attorneys' letter. He would not have cared had this unchanged phantom of the past and his hoary mentor been still in England, provided it were at a distance. But here they were, on the confines of his property, within a short drive of Marlowe, yet affecting to forget his invitation, his house, and

himself, and detected prowling in its vicinity like spies or poachers by moonlight. Was there not something insidious in this? It was not for nothing that so well-bred a person as that young man thus trampled on all the rules of courtesy for the sake of maintaining his incognito, and avoiding the obligations of hospitality.

So reasoned Sir Jekyl Marlowe, and felt himself rapidly relapsing into that dreamy and intense uneasiness, from which for a few hours he had been relieved.

‘A thousand apologies, Lady Jane,’ cried he, as he ran back and proffered his arm again. ‘I was afraid that fellow might be one of a gang—a very dangerous lot of rogues—poachers, I believe. There were people robbed here about a year ago, and I quite forgot when I asked you to come. I should never have forgiven myself—so selfishly forgetful—never, had you been frightened.’

Sir Jekyl could, of course, tell fibs, especially by way of apology, as plausibly as other men of the world. He had here

turned a negligence skilfully into a gallantry, and I suppose the lady forgave him.

The carriages had now arrived at the bend of this pretty road; and our Marlowe friends got in, and the whole cortège swept away merrily towards that old mansion. Sir Jekyl had been, with an effort, very lively all the way home, and assisted Lady Jane to the ground, smiling, and had a joke for General Lennox as he followed; and a very merry party mustered in the hall, prattling, laughing, and lighting their candles, to run up-stairs and dress for a late dinner.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STRANGERS APPEAR AGAIN.

SIR JEKYL was the last of the party in the hall; and the last joke and laugh had died away on the lobby above him, and away fled his smiles like the liveries and brilliants of Cinderella to the region of illusions, and black care laid her hand on his shoulder and stood by him.

The bland butler, with a grave bow, accosted him in mild accents—

‘The two gentlemen, sir, as you spoke of to Mrs. Sinnott, has arrived about five minutes before you, sir; and she has, please sir, followed your directions, and had them put in the rooms in the front, as you ordered, sir, should be kept for them, before Mrs. Gwynn left.’

‘*What* two gentlemen?’ demanded Sir

Jekyl, with a thrill. 'Mr. Strangways and M. Varbarriere?'

'Them, sir, I think, is the names — Strangways, leastways, I am sure on, 'aving lived, when young, with a branch of the Earl of Dilbury's family, if you please, sir— which Strangways is the name.'

'A good-looking young gentleman, tall and slight, eh?'

'Yes, sir; and a heavy gentleman hac-companies him — something in years — a furriner, as I suppose, and speaking French or Jarmin; leastways, it is not English.'

'Dinner in twenty minutes,' said Sir Jekyl, with the decision of the Duke of Wellington in action; and away he strode to his dressing-room in the back settlements, with a quick step and a thoughtful face.

'I shan't want you, Tomlinson, you need not stay,' said he to his man; but before he let him go, he asked carelessly a word or two about the new guests, and learned, in addition to what he already knew, nothing but that they had brought a servant with them.

‘So much the worse,’ thought Sir Jekyl; ‘those confounded fellows hear everything, and poke their noses everywhere. I sometimes think that rascal, Tomlinson, pries about here.’

And the Baronet, half-dressed, opened the door of his study, as he called it, at the further end of his homely bed-chamber, and looked round.

It is or might be a comfortable room, of some five - and - twenty feet square, surrounded by book-shelves, as homely as the style of the bed-room, stored with volumes of the ‘Annual Register,’ ‘Gentleman’s Magazine,’ and ‘Universal History’ sort—long rows in dingy gilding—moved up here when the old library of Marlowe was broken up. The room had a dusty air of repose about it. A few faded pieces of old-fashioned furniture, which had probably been quartered here in genteel retirement, long ago, when the principal sitting-rooms were undergoing a more modern decoration.

Here Sir Jekyl stood with a sudden look of dejection, and stared listlessly round on

the compact wall of books that surrounded him, except for the one door-case, that through which he had entered, and the two windows, on all sides. Sir Jekyl was in a sort of collapse of spirits. He stepped dreamily to the far shelf and took down a volume of Old Bailey Reports, and read the back of it several times, then looked round once more dejectedly, and blew the top of the volume, and wondered at the quantity of dust there, and replacing it, heaved a deep sigh. Dust and death are old associations, and his thoughts were running in a gloomy channel.

‘Is it worth all this?’ he thought. ‘I’m growing tired of it—utterly. I’m half sorry I came here; perhaps they are right. It might be a devilish good thing for me if this rubbishy old house were burnt to the ground—and I in it, by Jove! “Out, out, brief candle!” What’s that Shakspeare speech?—“A tale told by an idiot—a play played by an idiot”—egad! I don’t know why I do half the things I do.’

When he looked in the glass he did not like the reflection.

‘Down in the mouth—hang it! this will never do,’ and he shook his curls, and smirked, and thought of the ladies, and bustled away over his toilet; and when it was completed, as he fixed in his jewelled wrist-buttons, the cold air and shadow of his good or evil angel’s wing crossed him again, and he sighed. Capricious were his moods. Our wisdom is so frivolous, and our frivolities so sad. Is there time here to think out anything completely? Is it possible to hold by our conclusions, or even to remember them long? And this trifling and suffering are the woof and the warp of an eternal robe—wedding garment, let us hope—maybe winding-sheet, or—*toga molesta*.

Sir Jekyl, notwithstanding his somewhat interrupted toilet, was in the drawing-room before many of his guests had assembled. He hesitated for a moment at the door, and turned about with a sickening thrill, and walked to the table in the outer hall, or vestibule, where the postbag lay. He had no object in this countermarch, but to postpone for a second or two the meeting with

the gentlemen whom, with, as he sometimes fancied, very questionable prudence, he had invited under his roof.

And now he entered, frank, gay, smiling. His eyes did not search, they were, as it were, smitten instantaneously with a sense of pain, by the image of the young man, so handsome, so peculiar, sad, and noble, the sight of whom had so moved him. He was conversing with old Colonel Doocey, at the further side of the fireplace. In another moment Sir Jekyl was before him, his hand very kindly locked in his.

‘Very happy to see you here, Mr. Strangeways.’

‘I am very much honoured, Sir Jekyl Marlowe,’ returned the young gentleman, in that low sweet tone which he also hated. ‘I have many apologies to make. We have arrived two days later than your note appointed; but an accident’——

‘Pray, not a word—your appearance here is the best compensation you can make me. Your friend, Monsieur Varbarriere, I hope’——

‘ My uncle—yes ; he, too, has the honour. Will you permit me to present him ? Monsieur Varbarriere,’ said the young man, presenting his relative.

A gentleman at this summons turned suddenly from General Lennox, with whom he had been talking ; a high-shouldered, portly man, taller a good deal when you approached him than he looked at first ; his hair, ‘ all silvered,’ brushed up like Louis Philippe’s, conically from his forehead ; grey, heavily projecting eyebrows, long untrimmed moustache and beard ; altogether a head and face which seemed to indicate that combination of strong sense and sensuality which we see in some of the medals of Roman Emperors ; a forehead projecting at the brows, and keen dark eyes in shadow, observing all things from under their grizzled pent-house ; these points, and a hooked nose, and a certain weight and solemnity of countenance, gave to the large and rather pallid aspect, presented suddenly to the Baronet, something, as we have said, of the character of an old magician. Volu-

minous plaited black trousers, slanting in to the foot, foreshadowed the peg-top of more recent date; a loose and long black velvet waistcoat, with more gold chain and jewellery generally than Englishmen are accustomed to wear, and a wide and clumsy black coat, added to the broad and thick-set character of his figure.

As Sir Jekyl made his complimentary speech to this gentleman, he saw that his steady and shrewd gaze was attentively considering him in a way that a little tried his patience; and when the stranger spoke it was in French, and in that peculiar metallic diapason which we sometimes hear among the Hebrew community, and which brings the nasals of that tongue into sonorous and rather ugly relief.

‘England is, I dare say, quite new to you, Monsieur Varbarriere?’ inquired Sir Jekyl.

‘I have seen it a very long time ago, and admire your so fine country very much,’ replied the pallid and bearded sage, speaking in French still, and in those bell-like tones

which rang and buzzed unpleasantly in the ear.

‘ You find us the same foggy and tasteless islanders as before,’ said the host. ‘ In art, indeed, we have made an advance; *there*, I think, we have capabilities, but we are as a people totally deficient in that fine decorative sense which expresses itself so gracefully and universally in your charming part of the world.’

When Sir Jekyl talked of France, he was generally thinking of Paris.

‘ We have our barbarous regions, as you have; our vineyards are a dull sight after all, and our forest trees you, with your grand timber, would use for broom-sticks.’

‘ But your capital; why every time one looks out at the window it is a fillip to one’s spirits. To me, preferring France so infinitely, as I do,’ said Sir Jekyl, replying in his guest’s language, ‘ it appears a mystery why any Frenchman, who can help it, ever visits our dismal region.’

The enchanter here shrugged slowly, with a solemn smile.

‘No wonder our actions are mysterious to others, since they are so often so to ourselves.’

‘You are best acquainted with the south of France?’ said Sir Jekyl, without any data for such an assumption, and saying the reverse of what he suspected.

‘Very well with the south; pretty well, indeed, with most parts.’

Just at this moment Mr. Ridley’s bland and awful tones informed the company that dinner was on the table, and Sir Jekyl hastened to afford to Lady Blunket the support of his vigorous arm into the parlour.

It ought to have been given to Lady Jane; but the Blunket was a huffy old woman, and, on the score of a very decided seniority, was indulged.

Lady Blunket was not very interesting, and was of the Alderman’s opinion, that conversation prevents one’s tasting the green fat; Sir Jekyl had, therefore, time, with light and careless glances, to see pretty well, from time to time, what was going on among his guests. Monsieur Varbarriere

had begun to interest him more than Mr. Guy Strangways, and his eye oftener reviewed that ponderous and solemn face and form than any other at the table. It seemed that he liked his dinner, and attended to his occupation. But though taciturn, his shrewd eyes glanced from time to time on the host and his guests with an air of reserved observation that showed his mind was anything but sluggish during the process. He looked wonderfully like some of those enchanters whom we have seen in illustrations of Don Quixote.

‘A deep fellow,’ he thought, ‘an influential fellow. That gentleman knows what he’s about; that young fellow is in his hands.’

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.

SIR JEKYL heard snatches of conversation, sometimes here, sometimes there.

Guy Strangways was talking to Beatrix, and the Baronet heard him say, smiling—

‘But you don’t, I’m sure, believe in the elixir of life; you only mean to mystify us.’ He was looking more than ever—identical with that other person, whom it was not pleasant to Sir Jekyl to be reminded of—horribly like, in this white waxlight splendour.

‘But there’s another process, my uncle, Monsieur Varbarriere, says, by slow refrigeration: you are first put to sleep, and in that state frozen; and once frozen, without having suffered death, you may be kept in a state of suspended life for twenty or thirty years, neither conscious, nor growing old;

arrested precisely at the point of your existence at which the process was applied, and at the same point restored again whenever for any purpose it may be expedient to recall you to consciousness and activity.'

One of those restless, searching glances which the solemn, portly old gentleman in black directed, from time to time, as he indulged his taciturn gulosity, lighted on the Baronet at this moment, and Sir Jekyl felt that they exchanged an unintentional glance of significance. Each averted his quickly; and Sir Jekyl, with one of his chuckles, for the sake merely of saying something, remarked—

'I don't see how you can restore people to life by freezing them.'

'He did not speak, I think, of restoring life—did you, Guy?' said the bell-toned diapason of the old gentleman, speaking his nasal French.

'Oh, no—suspending merely,' answered the young man.

'To restore life, you must have recourse, I fancy, to a higher process,' continued the

sage, with an ironical gravity, and his eye this time fixed steadily on Sir Jekyl's ; 'and I could conceive none more embarrassing to the human race, *under certain circumstances,*' and he shrugged slowly and shook his head.

'How delightful!—no more death!' exclaimed enthusiastic Miss Blunket.

'Embarrassing, of course, I mean, to certain of the survivors.'

This old gentleman was hitting his tenderest points rather hard and often. Was it by chance or design? Who was he?

So thought the Baronet as he smiled and nodded.

'Do you know who that fat old personage is who dresses like an undertaker and looks like a Jew?' asked Captain Drayton of Beatrix.

'I think he is a relative of Mr. Strangways.'

'And who *is* Mr. Strangways?'

'He's at my right, next me,' answered she in a low tone, not liking the very clear and distinct key in which the question was put.

But Captain Drayton was not easily disconcerted, being a young gentleman of a bold and rather impertinent temperament, and he continued leaning back in his chair and looking dreamily into his hock-glass.

‘Not a friend of yours, is he?’

‘Oh, no.’

‘Really—not a friend. You’re *quite* certain?’

‘Perfectly. We never saw either—that is, papa met them at some posting place on his way from London, and invited them; but I think he knows nothing more.’

‘Well, I did not like to say till I knew, but I think him—the old fellow—I have not seen the young man—a most vulgar-looking old person. He’s a wine-jobber, or manager of a factory, or something. You never saw—I know Paris by heart—you *never saw* such a thing in gentlemanly society there.’

And the young lady heard him say, *sotto voce*, ‘Brute!’ haughtily to himself, as an interjection, while he just raised the fingertips of the hand which rested on the table,

and let them descend again on the snowy napery. The subject deserved no more troublesome gesture.

‘And where is the young gentleman?’ asked Captain Drayton, after a little interval.

Beatrix told him again.

‘Oh! *That’s* he! Isn’t his French very bad—did it strike you? Bad *accent*—I can tell in a moment. That’s not an accent one hears anywhere.’

Oddly enough, Sir Jekyl at the same time, with such slight interruptions as his agreeable attentions to Lady Blunket imposed, was, in the indistinct way in which such discussions are mentally pursued, observing upon the peculiarities of his two new guests, and did not judge them amiss.

The elder was odd, take him for what country you pleased. Bearded like a German, speaking good French, with a good accent, but in the loud full tones of a Spaniard, and with a quality of voice which resounds in the synagogue, and a quietude of demeanour much more English than

continental. His dress, such as I have described it, fine in material, but negligent and easy, though odd. Reserved and silent he was, a little sinister perhaps, but his bearing unconstrained and gracious when he spoke. There was, indeed, that odd, watchful glance from under his heavy eyebrows, which, however, had nothing sly, only observant, in it. Again he thought, 'Who could he be?' On the whole, Sir Jekyl was in nowise disposed to pronounce upon him as Captain Drayton was doing a little way down the table; nor yet upon Guy Strangways, whom he thought, on the contrary, an elegant young man, according to French notions of the gentlemanly, and he knew the French people a good deal better than the youthful Captain did.

The principal drawing-room of Marlowe is a very large apartment, and people can talk of one another in it without any risk of detection.

'Well, Lady Jane,' said the Baronet, sitting down before that handsome woman, and her husband the General, so as to inter-

rupt a conjugal *tête-à-tête*, probably a particularly affectionate one, for he was to leave for London next day. 'I saw you converse with Monsieur Varbarriere. What do you think of him?'

'I don't think I conversed with him—did I? He talked to me; but I really did not take the trouble to think about him.'

The General laughed triumphantly, and glanced over his shoulder at the Baronet. He liked his wife's contempt for the rest of the sex, and her occasional—*only* occasional—enthusiasm for him.

'Now you are much too clever, Lady Jane, to be let off so. I really want to know something about him, which I don't at present; and if anyone can help me to a wise conjecture, you, I am certain, can.'

'And don't you really know who he is?' inquired General Lennox, with a haughty military surprise.

'Upon my honour, I have not the faintest idea,' answered Sir Jekyl. 'He may be a cook or a rabbi, for anything I can tell.'

The General's white eyebrows went some

wrinkles up the slanting ascent of his pink forehead, and he plainly looked his amazement that Lady Jane should have been subjected at Marlowe to the risk of being accosted on equal terms by a cook or a rabbi. His lips screwed themselves unconsciously into a small o, and his eyes went in search of the masquerading menial.

‘We had a cook,’ said the General, still eyeing M. Varbarriere, ‘at Futtychur, a French fellow, fat like that, but shorter—a capital cook, by Jove! and a very gentlemanly man. He wore a white cap, and he had a very good way of stewing tomatas and turkeys, I think it was, and—yes it was—and a monstrous gentlemanlike fellow he was; rather too expensive though; he cost us a great deal,’ and the General winked slyly. ‘I had to speak to him once or twice. But an uncommon gentlemanlike man.’

‘He’s not a cook, my dear. He may be a banker, perhaps,’ said Lady Jane, languidly.

‘You have exactly hit my idea,’ said Sir

Jekyl. 'It was his knowing all about French banking, General, when you mentioned that trick that was played you on the Bourse.'

At this moment the massive form and face of M. Varbarriere was seen approaching with Beatrix by his side. They were conversing, but the little group we have just been listening to dropped the discussion of M. Varbarriere, and the Baronet said that he hoped General Lennox would have a fine day for his journey, and that the moon looked particularly bright and clear.

'I want to show Monsieur Varbarriere the drawings of the house, papa; they are in this cabinet. He admires the architecture very much.'

The large enchanter in black made a solemn bow of acquiescence here, but said nothing; and Beatrix took from its nook a handsome red-leather portfolio, on the side of which, in tall golden letters, were the words—

VIEWS AND ELEVATIONS
OF
MARLOWE MANOR HOUSE.

PAULO ABRUZZI,
ARCHITECT.
1711.

‘Capital drawing, I am told. He was a young man of great promise,’ said Sir Jekyl, in French. ‘But the style is quite English, and, I fear, will hardly interest an eye accustomed to the more graceful contour of southern continental architecture.’

‘Your English style interests me very much. It is singular, and suggests hospitality, enjoyment, and mystery.’

Monsieur Varbarriere was turning over these tinted drawings carefully.

‘Is not that very true, papa—hospitality, enjoyment, mystery?’ repeated Beatrix. ‘I think that faint character of mystery is so pleasant. We have a mysterious room here.’ She had turned to M. Varbarriere.

‘Oh, a dozen,’ interrupted Sir Jekyl. ‘No end of ghosts and devils, you know. But I really think you excel us in that article. I

resided for five weeks in a haunted house once, near Havre, and the stories were capital, and there were some very good noises too. We must get Dives to tell it by-and-by; he was younger than I, and more frightened.'

'And Mademoiselle says you have a haunted apartment here,' said the ponderous foreigner with the high forehead and projecting brows.

'Yes, of course. We are very much haunted. There is hardly a crooked passage or a dark room that has not a story,' said Sir Jekyl. 'Beatrix, why don't you sing us a song, by-the-bye?'

'May I beg one other favour first, before the crowning one of the song?' said M. Varbarriere, with an imposing playfulness. 'Mademoiselle, I am sure, tells a story well. Which, I entreat, is the particular room you speak of?'

'We call it the green chamber,' said Beatrix.

'The green chamber—what a romantic title!' exclaimed the large gentleman in

black, graciously; 'and where is it situated?' he pursued.

'We must really put you into it,' said Sir Jekyl.

'Nothing I should like so well,' he observed, with a bow.

'That is, of course, whenever it is deserted. You have not been plagued with apparitions, General? Even Lady Jane—and there are no ghost-seers like ladies, I've observed—has failed to report anything horrible.'

His hand lay on the arm of her chair, and, as he spoke, for a moment pressed hers, which, not choosing to permit such accidents, she, turning carelessly and haughtily toward the other speakers, slipped away.

CHAPTER XIV.

MUSIC.

‘AND pray, Mademoiselle Marlowe, in what part of the house is this so wonderful room situated?’ persisted the grave and reverend signor.

‘Quite out of the question to describe to one who does not already know the house,’ interposed Sir Jekyl. ‘It is next the six-sided dressing-room, which opens from the hatchment gallery—that is its exact situation; and I’m afraid I have failed to convey it,’ said Sir Jekyl, with one of his playful chuckles.

The Druidic-looking Frenchman shrugged and lifted his fingers with a piteous expression of perplexity, and shook his head.

‘Is there not among these drawings a view of the side of the house where this room lies?’ he inquired.

‘I was looking it out,’ said Beatrix.

‘I’ll find it, Trixie. Go you and sing us a song,’ said the Baronet.

‘I’ve got them both, papa. Now, Monsieur Varbarriere, here they are. This is the front view—this is the side.’

‘I am very much obliged,’ said Monsieur examining the drawings curiously. ‘The room recedes. This large bow-window belongs to it. Is it not so?—wide room?—how long? You see I want to understand everything. Ah! yes, here is the side view. It projects from the side of the older building, I see. How charming! And this is the work of the Italian artist? The style is quite novel—a mixture partly Florentine—really very elegant. Did he build anything more here?’

‘Yes, a very fine row of stables, and a temple in the grounds,’ said Sir Jekyl. ‘You shall see them to-morrow.’

‘The chamber green. Yes, very clever, very pretty;’ and having eyed them over again carefully, he said, laying them down—

‘A curious as well as a handsome old

house, no doubt. Ah! very curious, I dare say,' said the sage Monsieur Varbarriere. 'Are there here the ground plans?'

'We have them somewhere, I fancy, among the title-deeds, but none here,' said Sir Jekyl, a little stiffly, as if it struck him that his visitor's curiosity was a trifle less ceremonious than, all things considered, it might be.

Pretty Beatrix was singing now to her own accompaniment; and Captain Drayton, twisting the end of his light moustache, stood haughtily by her side. The music in his ear was but a half-heard noise. Indeed, although he had sat out operas innumerable, like other young gentlemen, who would sit out as many hours of a knife-grinder's performance, or of a railway whistle, if it were the fashion, had but an imperfect recollection of the airs he had paid so handsomely to hear, and was no authority on music of any sort.

Now Beatrix was pretty—more than pretty. Some people called her lovely. She sang in that rich and plaintive contralto—

so rare and so inexplicably moving—the famous ‘Come Gentil,’ from Don Pasquale. When she ceased, the gentleman at her other side, Guy Strangways, sighed—not a complimentary—a real sigh.

‘That is a wonderful song, the very spirit of a serenade. Such distance—such gaiety—such sadness. Your Irish poet, Thomas Moore, compares some spiritual music or kind voice to sunshine spoken. This is *moonlight*—*moonlight sung*, and *so* sung that I could dream away half a life in listening, and yet sigh when it ceases.’

Mr. Guy Strangway’s strange, dark eyes looked full on her, as with an admiring enthusiasm he said these words.

The young lady smiled, looking up for a moment from the music-stool, and then with lowered eyes again, and that smile of gratification which is so beautiful in a lovely girl’s face.

‘It is quite charming, really. I’m no musician, you know; but I enjoy good music extravagantly, especially singing,’ said Captain Drayton. ‘I don’t aspire to

talk sentiment and that kind of poetry.' He was, perhaps, near using a stronger term—'a mere John Bull; but it *is*, honestly, charming.'

He had his glass in his eye, and turned back the leaf of the song to the title-page.

'Don Pasquale—yes. Sweet opera that. How often I have listened to Mario in it! But never, Miss Marlowe, with more real pleasure than to the charming performance I have just heard.'

Captain Drayton was not making his compliment well, and felt it somehow. It was clumsy—it was dull—it was meant to override the tribute offered by Guy Strangways, whose presence he chose, in modern phrase, to ignore; and yet he felt that he had, as he would have expressed it, rather 'put his foot in it;' and, with just a little flush in his cheek and rather angry eyes, he stooped over the piano and read the Italian words half aloud.

'By-the-bye,' he said, suddenly recollecting a topic, 'what a sweet scene that is of Gryston Bridge? Have you ever been to see it before?'

‘Once since we came, we rode there, papa and I,’ answered Miss Marlowe. ‘It looked particularly well this evening—quite beautiful in the moonlight.’

‘Is it possible, Miss Marlowe, that *you* were there this evening? I and my uncle stopped on our way here to admire the exquisite effect of the steep old bridge, with a wonderful foreground of Druidic monuments, as they seemed to me.’

‘Does your father preserve that river?’ asked Captain Drayton, coolly pretermitting Mr. Strangways altogether.

‘I really don’t know,’ she replied, in a slight and hurried way that nettled the Captain; and, turning to Guy Strangways, she said, ‘Did you see it *from* the bridge?’

‘No, Mademoiselle; from the mound in which those curious stones are raised,’ answered Mr. Strangways.

Captain Drayton felt that Miss Marlowe’s continuing to talk to Mr. Strangways, while *he* was present and willing to converse, was extremely offensive, choosing to entertain a low opinion in all respects of that person.

He stooped a little forward, and stared at the stranger with that ill-bred gaze of insolent surprise which is the peculiar weapon of Englishmen, and which very distinctly expresses, 'who the devil are you?'

Perhaps it was fortunate for the harmony of the party that just at this moment, and before Captain Drayton could say anything specially impertinent, Sir Jekyl touched Drayton on the shoulder, saying—

'Are you for whist?'

'No, thanks—I'm no player.'

'Oh! Mr. Strangways—I did not see—do *you* play?'

Mr. Strangways smiled, bowed, and shook his head.

'Drayton, did I present you to Mr. Strangways?' and the Baronet made the two young gentlemen technically known to one another—though, of course, each knew the other already.

They bowed rather low, and a little haughtily, neither smiling. I suppose Sir Jekyl saw something a little dangerous in the countenance of one at least of the gen-

tlemen as he approached, and chose to remind them, in that agreeable way, that he was present, and wished them acquainted, and of course friendly.

He had now secured old Colonel Doocey to make up his party—the sober old Frenchman and Sir Paul Blunket making the supplementary two; and before they had taken their chairs round the card-table, Captain Drayton said, with a kind of inclination rather insolent than polite—

‘You are of the Dilbury family, of course?’ I never knew a Strangways yet—I mean, of course, a Strangways such as one would be likely to meet, you know—who was not.’

‘You know one now, sir; for I am not connected ever so remotely with that distinguished family. My family are quite another Strangways.’

‘No doubt quite as respectable,’ said Captain Drayton, with a bow, a look, and a tone that would have passed for deferential with many; but which, nevertheless, had the subtle flavour of an irony in it.

‘Perhaps more so; my ancestors are the

Strangways of Lynton; you are aware they had a peerage down to the reign of George II.'

Captain Drayton was not as deep as so fashionable and moneyed a man ought to have been in extinct peerages, and therefore he made a little short supercilious bow, and no answer. He looked drowsily toward the ceiling, and then—

'The Strangways of Lynton are on the Continent or something—one does not hear of them,' said Captain Drayton, slightly but grandly. 'We are the Draytons of Drayton Forest, in the same county.'

'Oh! then my uncle is misinformed. He thought that family was extinct, and lamented over it when we saw the house and place at a distance.'

Captain Drayton coloured a little above his light yellow moustache. He was no Drayton, but a remotely collateral Smithers, with a queen's letter constituting him a Drayton.

'Aw—yes—it is a fine old place—quite misinformed. I can show you our descent if you wish it.'

If Drayton had collected his ideas a little first he would not have made this condescension.

‘Your descent is high and pure—*very* high, I assume—mine is only respectable—presentable, as you say, but by no means so high as to warrant my inquiring into that of other people.’

‘Inquiry! of course. I did not say inquiry,’ and with an effort Captain Drayton almost laughed.

‘Nothing more dull,’ acquiesced Mr. Strangways slightly.

Both gentlemen paused—each seemed to expect something from the other—each seemed rather angrily listening for it. The ostensible attack had all been on the part of the gallant Captain, who certainly had not been particularly well bred. The Captain, nevertheless, felt that Mr. Strangways knew perfectly all about Smithers, and that Smithers really had not one drop of the Drayton blood in his veins; and he felt in the sore and secret centre of his soul that the polished, handsome young gentleman, so easy,

so graceful, with that suspicion of a foreign accent and of foreign gesture, had the best of the unavowed battle. He had never spoken a word or looked a look in the course of this little dialogue which could have suggested an idea of altercation, or any kind of mutual unpleasantness, to the beautiful young girl; who, with one hand on the keys of the piano, touched them so lightly with her fingers as to call forth a dream of an air rather than the air itself.

To her Guy Strangways turned, with his peculiar smile—so winning, yet so deep—an enigmatic smile that had in it a latent sadness and fierceness, and by its very ambiguousness interested one.

‘I upbraid myself for losing these precious moments while you sit here, and might, perhaps, be persuaded to charm us with another song.’

So she was persuaded; Captain Drayton still keeping guard, and applauding, though with no special goodwill toward the unoffending stranger.

The party broke up early. The ladies

trooped to their bed-room candles and ascended the great staircase, chatting harmoniously, and bidding mutual sweet good-nights as in succession they reached their doors. The gentlemen, having sat for awhile lazily about the fire, or gathered round the tray whereon stood sherry and seltzer water, repaired also to the cluster of bed-chamber candlesticks without, and helped themselves, talking together in like sociable manner.

‘Would you like to come to my room and have a cigar, Monsieur Varbarriere?’ asked the Baronet in French.

Monsieur was much obliged, and bowed very suavely, but declined.

‘And you, Mr. Strangways?’

He also, with many thanks, a smile and a bow, declined.

‘My quarters are quite out of reach of the inhabited part of the house—not very far from two hundred feet from this spot, by Jove! right in the rear. You must really come to me there some night; you’ll be amused at my deal furniture and rustic

barbarism ; we often make a party there and smoke for half an hour.'

So, as they were not to be persuaded, the Baronet hospitably accompanied them to their rooms, at the common dressing-room door of which stood little Jacque Duval with his thin, bronzed face, candle in hand, bowing, to receive his master.

CHAPTER XV.

M. VARBARRIERE CONVERSES WITH HIS
NEPHEW.

HERE then Sir Jekyl bid them good-night, and descended the great staircase, and navigated the long line of passage to the back stairs leading up to his own homely apartment.

The elder man nodded to Jacque, and moved the tips of his fingers towards the door—a silent intimation which the adroit valet perfectly understood; so, with a cheerful bow, he withdrew.

There was a gay little spluttering fire in the grate, which the sharpness of the night made very pleasant. The clumsy door was shut, and the room had an air of comfortable secrecy which invited a talk.

It was not to come, however, without preparation. He drew a chair before the

fire, and sat down solemnly, taking a gigantic cigar from his case, and moistening it diligently between his lips before lighting it. Then he pointed to a chair beside the hearth, and presented his cigar-case to his young companion, who being well versed in his elder's ways, helped himself, and having, like him, foreign notions about smoking, had of course no remorse about a cigar or two in their present quarters.

Up the chimney chiefly whisked the narcotic smoke. Over the ponderous features and knotted forehead of the sage flushed the uncertain light of the fire, revealing all the crows' feet—all the lines which years, thought, passion, or suffering had traced on that large, sombre, and somewhat cadaverous countenance, reversing oddly some of its shadows, and glittering with a snakelike brightness on the eyes, which now gazed grimly into the bars under their heavy brows.

The large and rather flat foot, shining in French leather, of the portly gentleman in the ample black velvet waistcoat, rested on

the fender, and he spoke not a word until his cigar was fairly smoked out and the stump of it in the fire. Abruptly he began, without altering his pose or the direction of his gaze.

‘You need not make yourself more friendly with any person here than is absolutely necessary.’

He was speaking French, and in a low tone that sounded like the boom of a distant bell.

Young Strangways bowed acquiescence.

‘Be on your guard with Sir Jekyl Marlowe. Tell him *nothing*. Don’t let him be kind to you. He will have no kind motive in being so. Fence with his questions—don’t answer them. Remember he is an artful man without any scruple. I know him and all about him.’

M. Varbarriere spoke each of these little sentences in an isolated way, as a smoker might, although he was no longer smoking, between his puffs. ‘Therefore, not a word to him—no obligations—no intimacy. If he catches you by the hand, even by your

little finger, in the way of friendship, he'll cling to it, so as to impede your *arm*, should it become necessary to exert it.'

'I don't understand you, sir,' said the young man, in a deferential tone, but looking very hard at him.

'You *partly* don't understand me; the nature of my direction, however, is clear. Observe it strictly.'

There was a short silence here.

'I don't understand, sir, what covert hostility can exist between us; that is, why I should, in your phrase, keep my hand free to exert it against him.'

'No, I don't suppose you do.'

'And I can't help regretting that, if such are our possible relations, I should find myself as a guest under his roof,' said the young man, with a pained and almost resentful look.

'You can't help regretting, and—you can't help the circumstance,' vibrated his Mentor, in a metallic murmur, his cadaverous features wearing the same odd character of deep thought and apathy.

‘I don’t know, with respect to *him*—I know, however, how it has affected me—that I have felt unhappy, and even guilty since this journey commenced, as if I were a traitor and an impostor,’ said the young man, with a burst of impatience.

‘Don’t, sir, use phrases which reflect back upon *me*,’ said the other, turning upon him with a sudden sternness. ‘All you have done is by my direction.’

The ample black waistcoat heaved and subsided a little faster than before, and the imposing countenance was turned with pallid fierceness upon the young man.

‘I am sorry, uncle.’

‘So you should—you’ll see one day how little it is to me, and how much to you.’

Here was a pause. The senior turned his face again toward the fire. The little flush that in wrath always touched his forehead subsided slowly. He replaced his foot on the fender, and chose another cigar.

‘There’s a great deal you don’t see now that you will presently. I did not want to see Sir Jekyl Marlowe any more than you

did or do; but I did want to see this place. You'll know hereafter why. I'd rather not have met him. I'd rather not be his guest. Had he been as usual at Dartbroke, I should have seen all I wanted without that annoyance. It is an accident his being here—another, his having invited me; but no false ideas and no trifling chance shall regulate, much less stop, the action of the machine which I am constructing and will soon put in motion.'

And with these words he lighted his cigar, and after smoking for a while he lowered it, and said—

'Did Sir Jekyl put any questions to you, with a view to learn particulars about you or me?'

'I don't recollect that he did. I rather think not; but Captain Drayton did.'

'I know, *Smithers*?'

'Yes, sir.'

'With an object?' inquired the elder man.

'I think not — merely impertinence.' answered Guy Strangways.

‘ You are right—it is nothing to him. I do not know that even Marlowe has a suspicion. Absolutely impertinence.’

And upon this M. Varbarriere began to smoke again with resolution and energy.

‘ You understand, Guy ; you may be as polite as you please—but no friendship—nowhere—you must remain quite unembarrassed.’

Here followed some more smoke, and after it the question—

‘ What do you think of the young lady, Mademoiselle Marlowe ?’

‘ She sings charmingly, and for the rest, I believe she is agreeable ; but my opportunities have been very little.’

‘ What do you think of our fellow Jacque—is he trustworthy ?’

‘ Perfectly, so far as I know.’

‘ You never saw him peep into letters, or that kind of thing ?’

‘ Certainly not.’

‘ There is a theory which must be investigated, and I should like to employ him. You know nothing against him, nor do I.’

‘Suppose we go to our beds?’ resumed the old gentleman, having finished his cigar.

A door at either side opened from the dressing-room, by whose fire they had been sitting.

‘See which room is meant for me—Jacque will have placed my things there.’

The young man did as he was bid, and made his report.

‘Well, get you to bed, Guy, and remember—no friendships and no follies.’

And so the old man rose, and shook his companion’s hand, not smiling, but with a solemn and thoughtful countenance, and they separated for the night.

Next morning as the Rev. Dives Marlowe stood in his natty and unexceptionable clerical costume on the hall-door steps, looking with a pompous and, perhaps, a somewhat forbidding countenance upon the morning prospect before him, his brother joined him.

‘Early bird, Dives, pick the worm—eh? Healthy and wise already, and wealthy to be. Slept well, eh?’

‘Always well here,’ answered the parson. He was less of a parson and more like himself with Jekyl than with anyone else. His brother was so uncomfortably amused with his clerical airs, knew him so well, and so undisguisedly esteemed him of the earth earthy, that the cleric, although the abler as well as the better read man, always felt invariably a little sheepish before him, in his silk vest and single-breasted coat with the standing collar, and the demi-shovel, which under other eyes he felt to be imposing properties.

‘You look so like that exemplary young man in Watts’ hymns, in the old-fashioned togger, Dives—the fellow with the handsome round cheeks, you know, piously saluting the morning sun that’s rising with a lot of spokes stuck out of it, don’t you remember?’

‘I look like something that’s ugly, I dare say,’ said the parson, who had not got up in a good temper. ‘There never was a Marlowe yet who hadn’t ugly points about him. But a young man, though never so

ugly, is rather a bold comparison—eh ? seeing I'm but two years your junior, Jekyl.'

'Bitterly true—every word—my dear boy. But let us be pleasant. I've had a line to say that old Moulders is very ill, and really dying this time. Just read this melancholy little bulletin.'

With an air which seemed to say, 'well, to please you,' he took the note and read it. It was from his steward, to mention that the Rev. Abraham Moulders was extremely ill of his old complaint, and that there was something even worse the matter, and that Doctor Winters had said that morning he could not possibly get over this attack.

'Well, Dives, there is a case of "sick and weak" for you ; you'll have prayers for him at Queen's Chorleigh, eh ?'

'Poor old man!' said Dives, solemnly, with his head thrown back, and his thick eyebrows elevated a little, and looking straight before him as he returned the note, 'he's very ill, indeed, unless this reports much too unfavourably.'

‘Too favourably, you mean,’ suggested the Baronet.

‘But you know, poor old man, it is only wonderful he has lived so long. The old people about there say he is eighty-seven. Upon my word, old Jenkins says he told him, two years ago, himself, he was eighty-five; and Doctor Winters, no chicken—just sixty—says his father was in the same college with him, at Cambridge, nearly sixty-seven years ago. You know, my dear Jekyl, when a man comes to that time of life, it’s all idle—a mere pull against wind and tide, and everything. It is appointed unto all men once to die, you know, and the natural term is three-score years and ten. All idle—all in vain!’

And delivering this, the Rev. Dives Marlowe shook his head with a supercilious melancholy, as if the Rev. Abraham Moulders’ holding out in that way against the inevitable was a piece of melancholy bravado, against which, on the part of modest mortality, it was his sad duty to protest.

Jekyl's cynicism was tickled, although there was care at his heart, and he chuckled.

'And how do you know you have any interest in the old fellow's demise?'

The Rector coughed a little, and flushed, and looked as careless as he could, while he answered—

'I said nothing of the kind; but you have always told me you meant the living for me. I've no reason, only your goodness, Jekyl.'

'No goodness at all,' said Jekyl, kindly. 'You shall have it, of course. I always meant it for you, Dives, and I wish it were better, and I'm very glad, for I'm fond of you, old fellow.'

Hereupon they both laughed a little, shaking hands very kindly.

'Come to the stable, Dives,' said the Baronet, taking his arm. 'You must choose a horse. You don't hunt now?'

'I have not been at a cover for *ten* years,' answered the reverend gentleman, speaking with a consciousness of the demi-shovel.

'Well, come along,' continued the Baro-

net. 'I want to ask you—let's be serious' (everybody likes to be serious over his own business). 'What do you think of these foreign personages?'

'The elder, I should say, an able man,' answered Dives; 'I dare say could be agreeable. It is not easy to assign his exact rank though, nor his profession or business. You remarked he seems to know something in detail and technically of nearly every business one mentions.'

'Yes; and about the young man—that Mr. Guy Strangways, with his foreign accent and manner—did anything strike you about him?'

'Yes, certainly, could not fail. The most powerful likeness, I think, I ever saw in my life.'

They both stopped, and exchanged a steady and anxious look, as if each expected the other to say more; and after a while the Rev. Dives Marlowe added, with an awful sort of nod—

'Guy Deverell.'

The Baronet nodded in reply.

‘Well, in fact, he appeared to me something *more* than like—the same—identical.’

‘And old Lady Alice saw him in Wardlock Church, and was made quite ill,’ said the Baronet gloomily. ‘But you know he’s gone these thirty years; and there is no necromancy now-a-days; only I wish you would take any opportunity, and try and make out all about him, and what they want. I brought them here to pump them, by Jove; but that old fellow seems deuced reserved and wary. Only, like a good fellow, if you can find or make an opportunity, you must get the young fellow on the subject—for I don’t care to tell you, Dives, I have been devilish uneasy about it. There are things that make me confoundedly uncomfortable; and I have a sort of foreboding it would have been better for me to have blown up this house than to have come here; but ten to one—a hundred to one—there’s nothing, and I’m only a fool.’

As they thus talked they entered the gate of the stable-yard.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONTAINING A VARIETY OF THINGS.

‘GUY DEVERELL left no issue,’ said Dives.

‘No; none in the world; neither chick nor child. I need not care a brass farthing about any that can’t inherit, if there were any; but there isn’t one; there’s no real danger, you see. In fact, there *can’t* be *any*—eh? I don’t see it. Do you? You were a sharp fellow always, Dives. *Can* you see anything threatening in it?’

‘*It! What?*’ said the Rev. Dives Marlowe. ‘I see *nothing—nothing whatever—absolutely* nothing. Surely you can’t fancy that a mere resemblance, however strong, where there can’t possibly be identity, and the fact that the young man’s name is Guy, will make a case for alarm!’

‘Guy *Strangways*, you know,’ said Sir Jekyl.

‘ Well, what of Strangways ? I don’t see.’

‘ Why, Strangways, you remember, or *don’t* remember, was the name of the fellow that was always with—with—that cross-grained muff.’

‘ With Guy Deverell, you mean ?’

‘ Ay, with him that night, and constantly, and abroad I think at those German gaming-places where he played so much.’

‘ I forgot the name. I remember hearing there *was* a person in your company that unlucky night ; but you never heard more of him ?’

‘ No, of course ; for he owed me a precious lot of money ;’ and from habit he chuckled, but with something of a frown. ‘ He could have given me a lot of trouble, but so could I him. My lawyers said he could not seriously affect me, but he might have annoyed me ; and I did not care about the money, so I did not follow him ; and, as the lawyers say, we turned our backs on one another.’

‘ Strangways,’ murmured the Rector, musingly.

‘Do you remember him now?’ asked Sir Jekyl.

‘No; that is, I’m not sure. I was in orders then though, and could hardly have met him. I am sure I should recollect him if I had. What was he like?’

‘A nasty-looking Scotch dog, with freckles—starved and tall—a hungry hound—large hands and feet—as ugly a looking cur as you ever beheld.’

‘But Deverell, poor fellow, was a bit of a dandy—wasn’t he? How did he come to choose such a companion?’

‘Well, maybe he was not quite as bad as he describes, and his family was good, I believe; but there must have been something more, he hung about him so. Yes, he *was* a most objectionable-looking fellow—so awkward, and not particularly well dressed; but a canny rascal, and knew what he was about. I could not make out what use Deverell made of him, nor exactly what advantage he made of Deverell.’

‘I can’t, for the life of me, see, Jekyl, anything in it except a resemblance, and

that is positively nothing, and a Christian name, that is all, and Guy is no such uncommon one. As for Strangways, he does not enter into it at all—a mere accidental association. Where is that Strangways—is he living?’

‘I don’t know now; ten years ago he was, and Pelter and Crowe thought he was going to do me some mischief, a prosecution or something, they thought, to extort money; but I knew they were wrong. I had a reason—at least it was unlikely, because I rather think he had repaid me that money about then. A year or so before a large sum of money was lodged to my account by Herbert Strangways, that was his name, at the International Bank in Lombard Street; in fact it was more than I thought he owed me—interest, I suppose, and that sort of thing. I put Pelter and Crowe in his track, but they could make out nothing. The bank people could not help us. Unluckily I was away at the time, and the lodgment was two months old when I heard of it. There were several raw Scotch-

looking rascals, they said, making lodgments about then, and they could not tell exactly what sort of fellow made this. I wanted to make out about him. What do you think of it?’

‘I don’t see anything suspicious in it. He owed you the money and chose to pay.’

‘He was protected by the Statute of Limitations, my lawyer said, and I could not have recovered it. Doesn’t it look odd?’

‘Those Scotch fellows.’

‘He’s not Scotch, though.’

‘Well, whatever he is, if he has good blood he’s proud, perhaps, and would rather pay what he owes than not.’

‘Well, of course, a fellow’s glad of the money; but I did not like it; it looked as if he wanted to get rid of the only pull I had on him, and was going to take steps to annoy me, you see.’

‘That’s ten years ago?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, considering how short life is, I think he’d have moved before now if he had

ever thought of it. It is a quarter of a century since poor Deverell's time. It's a good while, you know, and the longer you wait in matters of that kind the less your chance;' and with a brisk decision the Rector added, 'I'll stake, I think, all I'm worth, these people have no more connection with poor Deverell than Napoleon Bonaparte, and that Strangways has no more notion of moving any matter connected with that unhappy business than he has of leading an Irish rebellion.'

'I'm glad you take that view—I know it's the sound one. I knew you *would*. I think it's just a little flicker of gout. If I had taken Vichy on my way back I'd never have thought of it. I've no one to talk to. It's a comfort to see you, Dives. I wish you'd come oftener.' And he placed his hand very kindly on his brother's shoulder.

'So I will,' said Dives, not without kindness in his eyes, though his mouth was forbidding still. 'You must not let chimeras take hold of you. I'm very glad I was here.'

‘Did you remark that fat, mountainous French fellow, in that cursed suit of black, was very inquisitive about the green chamber?’ asked Sir Jekyl, relapsing a little.

‘No, I did not hear him mention it; what was it?’ asked Dives.

‘Well, not a great deal; only he seemed to want to know all about that particular room and its history, just as if there was already something in his head about it.’

‘Well, I told you, Jekyl,’ said Dives, in a subdued tone and looking away a little, ‘you ought to do something decisive about that room, all things considered. If it were mine, I can tell you, I should pull it down—not, of course, in such a way as to make people talk and ask questions, but as a sort of improvement. I’d make a conservatory, or something; you *want* a conservatory, and the building is positively injured by it. It is not the same architecture. You might put something there twice as good. At all events I’d get rid of it.’

‘So I will—I *intend*—I think you’re right—I really do. But it was brought about

by little Beatrix talking about haunted rooms, you know, and that sort of nonsense,' said Sir Jekyl.

'Oh! then she mentioned it? He only asked questions about what she told him. Surely you're not going to vex yourself about that?'

Sir Jekyl looked at him and laughed, but not quite comfortably.

'Well, I told you, you know, I do believe it's great; and whatever it is, I know, Dives, you've done me a great deal of good. Come, now, I've a horse I think you'll like, and you shall have him; try him to-day, and I'll send him home for you if he suits you.'

While the groom was putting up the horse, Sir Jekyl, who was quick and accurate of eye, recognised the dark-faced, intelligent little valet, whom he had seen for a moment, candle in hand, at the dressing-room door, last night, to receive his guests.

With a deferential smile, and shrug, and bow, all at once, this little gentleman lifted his cap with one hand, removing his German pipe with the other.

He had been a courier—clever, active, gay—a man who might be trusted with money, papers, diamonds. Beside his native French, he spoke English very well, and a little German. He could keep accounts, and write a neat little foreign hand with florid capitals. He could mend his own clothes, and even his shoes. He could play the flute a little, and very much the fiddle. He was curious, and liked to know what was taking place. He liked a joke and the dance, and was prone to the tender passion, and liked, in an honest way, a little bit of intrigue, or even espionage. Such a man he was as I could fancy in a light company of that marvellous army of Italy, of which Napoleon I. always spoke with respect and delight.

In the stable-yard, as I have said, the Baronet found this dark sprite smoking a German pipe; and salutations having been exchanged, he bid him try instead two of his famous cigars, which he presented, and then he questioned him on tobacco, and on his family, the theatres, the

railways, the hotels; and finally Sir Jekyl said

‘I wish you could recollect a man like yourself—I want one confoundedly. I shall be going abroad in August next year, and I’d give him five thousand francs a year, or more even, with pleasure, and keep him probably as long as he liked to stay with me. Try if you can remember such a fellow. Turn it over in your mind—do you see? and I don’t care how soon he comes into my service.’

The man lifted his cap again, and bowed even lower, as he undertook to ‘turn it over in his mind;’ and though he smiled a great deal, it was plain his thoughts were already seriously employed in turning the subject over, as requested by the Baronet.

Next morning M. Varbarriere took a quiet opportunity, in the hall, of handing to his host two letters of introduction, as they are called—one from the Baronet’s old friend, Charteris, attached to the embassy at Paris—a shrewd fellow, a man of the world, amphibious, both French and English, and

equally at home on either soil—speaking unmistakably in high terms of M. Varbarriere as of a gentleman very much respected in very high quarters. The other was equally handsome. But Charteris was exactly the man whose letter in such a case was to be relied upon.

The Baronet glanced over these, and said he was very glad to hear from his friend Charteris—the date was not a week since—but laughed at the formality, regretting that he had not a note from Charteris to present in return, and then gracefully quoted an old French distich, the sentiment of which is that ‘chivalry proclaims itself, and the gentleman is no more to be mistaken than the rose,’ and proceeded to ask his guest, ‘How is Charteris—he had hurt his wrist when I saw him last—and is there any truth in the report about his possible alliance with that rich widow?’ and so forth.

When Sir Jekyl got into his sanctum I am afraid he read both letters with a very microscopic scrutiny, and he resolved

inwardly to write a very sifting note to Charteris, and put it upon him, as an act of friendship, to make out every detail of the past life and adventures of M. Varbarriere, and particularly whether he had any young kinsman, nephew or otherwise, answering a certain description, all the items of which he had by rote.

But writing of letters is to some people a very decided bore. The Baronet detested it, and his anxieties upon these points being intermittent, the interrogatories were not so soon despatched to his friend Charteris.

Old General Lennox was away for London this morning; and his host took a seat beside him in the brougham that was to convey him to the station, and was dropped on the way at the keeper's lodge, when he said a kind and courteous adieu to his guest, whom he charged to return safe and soon, and kissed his hand, and waved it after the florid smiling countenance and bushy white eyebrows that were protruded from the carriage-window as it glided away.

' You can manage it all in a day or two,

can't you?' said the Baronet, cordially, as he held the General's wrinkled hand, with its knobby and pink joints, in his genial grasp. 'We positively won't give you more than three days' leave. Capital shooting when you come back. I'm going to talk it over with the keeper here—that is, if you come back before we've shot them all.'

'Oh! yes, hang it, you must leave a bird or two for me,' laughed the General, and he bawled the conclusion of the joke as the vehicle drove away; but Sir Jekyl lost it.

Sir Jekyl was all the happier for his morning's talk with his brother. An anxiety, if only avowed and discussed, is so immensely lightened; but Dives had scouted the whole thing so peremptorily that the Baronet was positively grateful. Dives was a wise and clear-headed fellow. It was delightful his taking so decided a view. And was it not on reflection manifestly, even to him, the sound view?

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MAGICIAN DRAWS A DIAGRAM.

THE Baronet approached Marlowe Manor on the side at which the stables and out-offices lie, leaving which to his left, he took his way by the path through the wood which leads to the terrace-walk that runs parallel to the side of the old house on which the green chamber lies.

On this side the lofty timber approaches the walks closely, and the green enclosure is but a darkened strip and very solitary. Here, when Sir Jekyl emerged, he saw M. Varbarriere standing on the grass, and gazing upward in absorbed contemplation of the building, which on the previous evening seemed to have excited his curiosity so unaccountably.

He did not hear the Baronet's approaching step on the grass. Sir Jekyl felt both

alarmed and angry; for although it was but natural that his guest should have visited the spot and examined the building, it yet seemed to him, for the moment, like the act of a spy.

‘Disappointed, I’m afraid,’ said he. ‘I told you that addition was the least worth looking at of all the parts of this otherwise ancient house.’

He spoke with a sort of sharpness that seemed quite uncalled for; but it was unnoticed.

M. Varbarriere bowed low and graciously.

‘I am much interested—every front of this curious and handsome house interests me. This indeed, as you say, is a good deal spoiled by that Italian incongruity—still it is charming—the contrast is as beautiful frequently as the harmony—and I am perplexed.’

‘Some of my friends tell me it spoils the house so much I ought to pull it down, and I have a great mind to do so. Have you seen the lake? I should be happy to show it to you if you will permit me.’

The Baronet, as he spoke, was, from time to time, slyly searching the solemn and profound face of the stranger; but could find there no clue to the spirit of his investigation. There was no shrinking—no embarrassment—no consciousness. He might as well have looked on the awful surface of the sea, in the expectation of discovering there the secrets of its depths.

M. Varbarriere, with a profusion of gratitude, regretted that he could not just then visit the lake, as he had several letters to write; and so he and his host parted smiling at the hall-door; and the Baronet, as he pursued his way, felt some stirrings of that mental dyspepsia which had troubled him of late.

‘The old fellow had not been in the house two hours,’ such was his train of thought, ‘when he was on the subject of that green chamber, in the parlour and in the drawing-room—again and again recurring to it; and here he was just now, alone, absorbed, and gazing up at its windows, as if he could think of nothing else!’

Sir Jekyl felt provoked, and almost as if he would like a crisis ; and half regretted that he had not asked him—‘Pray can I give you any information ; is there anything you particularly want to know about that room ? question me as you please, you shall see the room—you shall sleep in it if you like, so soon as it is vacant. Pray declare yourself, and say what you want.’

But second thoughts are said to be best, if not always wisest ; and this brief rehearing of the case against his repose ended in a ‘dismiss,’ as before. It was so natural, and indeed inevitable, that he should himself inspect the original of those views which he had examined the night before with interest, considering that, being a man who cared not for the gun or the fishing-rod, and plainly without sympathies with either georgics or bucolics, he had not many other ways of amusing himself in these country quarters.

M. Varbarriere, in the meantime, had entered his chamber. I suppose he was amused, for so soon as he closed the door

he smiled with a meditative sneer. It was not a fiendish one, not even moderately wicked; but a sneer is in the countenance what irony is in the voice, and never pleasant.

If the Baronet had seen the expression of M. Varbarriere's countenance as he sat down in his easy-chair, he would probably have been much disquieted—perhaps not without reason.

M. Varbarriere was known in his own neighbourhood as a dark and inflexible man, but with these reservations kind; just in his dealings, bold in enterprise, and charitable, but not on impulse, with a due economy of resource, and a careful measurement of desert; on the whole, a man to be respected and a little feared, but a useful citizen.

Instead of writing letters as, of course, he had intended, M. Varbarriere amused himself by making a careful little sketch on a leaf of his pocket-book. It seemed hardly worth all the pains he bestowed upon it; for, after all, it was but a parallelogram

with a projecting segment of a circle at one end, and a smaller one at the side, and he noted his diagram with figures, and pondered over it with a thoughtful countenance, and made, after a while, a little cross at one end of it, and then fell a-whistling thoughtfully, and nodded once or twice, as a thought struck him; and then he marked another cross at one of its sides, and reflected in like manner over this, and as he thought, fiddling with his pencil at the foot of the page, he scribbled the word 'hypothesis.' Then he put up his pocket-book, and stood listlessly with his hands in the pockets of his vast black trowsers, looking from the window, and whistled a little more, the air hurrying sometimes, and sometimes dragging a good deal, so as to come at times to an actual standstill.

On turning the corner of the mansion Sir Jekyl found himself on a sudden in the midst of the ladies of his party, just descending from the carriages which had driven them round the lake. He was of that gay and gallant temperament, as the reader is

aware, which is fired with an instantaneous inspiration at sight of this sort of plumage and flutter.

‘What a fortunate fellow am I!’ exclaimed Sir Jekyl, forgetting in a moment everything but the sunshine, the gay voices, and the pretty sight before him. ‘I had laid myself out for a solitary walk, and lo! I’m in the midst of a paradise of graces, nymphs, and what not!’

‘We have had such a charming drive round the lake,’ said gay little Mrs. Maberly.

‘The lake never looked so well before, I’m sure. So stocked, at least, with fresh-water sirens and mermaids. Never did mirror reflect so much beauty. An instinct, you see, drew me this way. I assure you I was on my way to the lake; one of those enamoured sprites who sing us tidings in such tiny voices, we can’t distinguish them from our own fancies, warbled a word in my ear, only a little too late, I suppose.’

The Baronet was reciting his admiring nonsense to pretty Mrs. Maberly, but his

eye from time to time wandered to Lady Jane, and rested for a moment on that haughty beauty, who, with downcast languid eyes, one would have thought neither heard nor saw him.

This gallant Baronet was so well understood that every lady expected to hear that kind of tender flattery whenever he addressed himself to the fair sex. It was quite inevitable, and simply organic and constitutional as blackbird's whistle and kitten's play, and, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, I am sure, meant absolutely nothing.

'But those sprites always come with a particular message; don't they?' said old Miss Blunket, smiling archly from the corners of her fierce eyes. 'Don't you think so, Mr. Linnett?'

'You are getting quite above me,' answered that sprightly gentleman, who was growing just a little tired of Miss Blunket's attentions. 'I suppose it's spiritualism. I know nothing about it. What do you say, Lady Jane?'

'I think it very heathen,' said Lady Jane, tired, I suppose, of the subject.

'I like to be heathen, now and then,' said Sir Jekyl, in a lower key; he was by this time beside Lady Jane. 'I'd have been a most pious Pagan. As it is, I can't help worshipping in the Pantheon, and trying sometimes even to make a proselyte.'

'Oh! you wicked creature!' cried little Mrs. Maberly. 'I assure you, Lady Jane, his conversation is quite frightful.'

Lady Jane glanced a sweet, rather languid, sidelong smile at the little lady.

'You'll not get Lady Jane to believe all that mischief of me, Mrs. Maberly. I appeal for my character to the General.'

'But he's hundreds of miles away, and can't hear you,' laughed little Mrs. Maberly, who really meant nothing satirical.

'I forgot; but he'll be back to-morrow or next day,' replied Sir Jekyl, with rather a dry chuckle, 'and in the meantime I must do without one, I suppose. Here we are, Mr. Strangways, all talking nonsense,

the pleasantest occupation on earth. Do come and help us.'

This was addressed to Guy Strangways, who, with his brother angler, Captain Doocey, in the picturesque negligence and black wide-awakes of fishermen, with baskets and rods, approached.

'Only too glad to be permitted to contribute,' said the young man, smiling, and raising his hat.

'And pray permit me, also,' said courtly old Doocey. 'I could talk it, I assure you, before he was born. I've graduated in the best schools, and was a doctor of nonsense before *he* could speak even a word of sense.'

'Not a bad specimen to begin with. Leave your rods and baskets there; some one will bring them in. Now we are so large a party, you must come and look at my grapes. I am told my black Hamburgs are the finest in the world.'

So, chatting and laughing, and some in other moods, toward those splendid graperies they moved, from which, as Sir

Jekyl used to calculate, he had the privilege of eating black Hamburg and other grapes at about the rate of one shilling each.

‘A grapery—how delightful!’ cried little Mrs. Maberly.

‘I quite agree with you,’ exclaimed Miss Blunket, who effervesced with a girlish enthusiasm upon even the most difficult subjects. ‘It is not the grapes, though they are so pretty, and a—bacchanalian—no, I don’t mean that—why do you laugh at me so?—but the atmosphere. Don’t you love it? it is so like Lisbon—at least what I fancy it, for I never was there; but at home, I bring my book there, and enjoy it so. I call it mock Portugal.’

‘It has helped to dry her,’ whispered Linnett so loud in Doocey’s ear as to make that courteous old dandy very uneasy.

It was odd that Sir Jekyl showed no sort of discomfort at sight of Guy Strangways on his sudden appearance; a thrill he felt indeed whenever he unexpectedly beheld that handsome and rather singular-looking

young man—a most unpleasant sensation—but although he moved about him like a resurrection of the past, and an omen of his fate, he yet grew in a sort of way accustomed to this haunting enigma, and could laugh and talk apparently quite carelessly in his presence. I have been told of men, the victims of a spectral illusion, who could move about a saloon, and smile, and talk, and listen, with their awful tormentor gliding always about them and spying out all their ways.

Just about this hour the clumsy old carriage of Lady Alice Redcliffe stood at her hall-door steps, in the small square courtyard of Wardlock Manor, and the florid iron gates stood wide open, resting on their piers. The coachman's purple visage looked loweringly round; the footman, with his staff of office in hand, leaning on the doorpost, gazed with a peevish listlessness through the open gateway across the road; the near horse had begun to hang his head, and his off-companion had pawed a considerable hole in Lady Alice's nattily-kept

gravel enclosure. From these signs one might have reasonably conjectured that these honest retainers, brute and human, had been kept waiting for their mistress somewhat longer than usual.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANOTHER GUEST PREPARES TO COME.

LADY ALICE was at that moment in her bonnet and ample black velvet cloak and ermines, and the rest of her travelling costume, seated in her stately parlour, which, like most parlours of tolerably old mansions in that part of the country, is wainscoted in very black oak. In her own way Lady Alice evinced at least as much impatience as her dependants out of doors; she tapped with her foot monotonously upon her carpet; she opened and shut her black shining leather bag, and plucked at and re-arranged its contents; she tattooed with her pale prolix fingers on the table; sometimes she sniffed a little; sometimes she muttered. As often as she fancied a sound, she raised her chin imperiously, and with a supercilious fixity, stared at the door until expecta-

tion had again expired in disappointment, when she would pluck out her watch, and glancing disdainfully upon it, exclaim—

‘Upon my life!’ or, ‘Very pretty behaviour!’

At last, however, the sound of a vehicle—a ‘fly’ it was—unmistakably made itself heard at the hall-door, and her lady, with a preparatory shake of her head, as a pugnacious animal shakes its ears, and a ‘hem,’ and a severe and pallid countenance, sat up, very high and stiffly, in her chair.

The door opened, and the splendid footman inquired whether her ladyship would please to see Mrs. Gwynn.

‘Show her in,’ said Lady Alice with a high look and an awful quietude.

And our old friend, Donica, just as thin, pallid, and, in her own way, self-possessed, entered the room.

‘Well, Donica Gwynn, you’ve come at *last!* you have kept my horses standing at the door—a thing I never do myself—for three-quarters of an hour and four minutes!’

Donica Gwynn was sorry; but she could

not help it. She explained how the delay had occurred, and, though respectful, her explanation was curt and dry in proportion to the sharpness and dryness of her reception.

‘Sit down, Donica,’ said the lady, relenting loftily. ‘How do you do?’

‘Pretty well, I thank your ladyship; and I hope I see *you* well, my lady.’

‘As well as I can ever be, Donica, and that is but poorly. I’m going, you know, to Marlowe.’

‘I’m rayther glad on it, my lady.’

‘And I wish to know *why*?’ said Lady Alice.

‘I wrote the why and the wherefore, my lady, in my letter,’ answered the ex-housekeeper, looking askance on the table, and closing her thin lips tightly when she had spoken.

‘Your letter, my good Donica, it is next to impossible to read, and quite impossible to understand. What I want to know distinctly is, why you have urged me so vehemently to go to Marlowe.’

‘ Well, my lady, I thought I said pretty plain it was about my Lady Jane, the pretty creature you had on visits here, and liked so well, poor thing ; an’ it seemed to me she’s like to be in danger where she is. I can’t explain how exactly ; but General Lennox is gone up to London, and I think, my lady, you ought to get her out of that unlucky room, where he has put her ; and, at all events, to keep as near to her as you can yourself, at *all* times.’

‘ I’ve listened to you, Donica, and I can’t comprehend you. I see you are hinting at something ; but unless you are explicit, I don’t see that I can be of any earthly use.’

‘ You can, my lady—that is, you *may*, if you only do as I say—I *can’t* explain it more, nor I *won’t*,’ said Donica, peremptorily, perhaps bitterly.

‘ There can be no good reason, Donica, for reserve upon a point of so much moment as you describe this to be. Wherever reserve exists there is mystery, and wherever mystery—*guilt*.’

So said Lady Alice, who was gifted with

a spirit of inquiry which was impatient of disappointment.

‘Guilt, indeed!’ repeated Gwynn, in an under-key, with a toss of her head and a very white face; ‘there’s secrets enough in the world, and no guilt along of ’em.’

‘What room is it you speak of—the green chamber, is not it?’

‘Yes, sure, my lady.’

‘I think you are all crazed about ghosts and devils over there,’ exclaimed Lady Alice.

‘Not much of ghosts, but devils, maybe,’ muttered Gwynn, oddly, looking sidelong over the floor.

‘It is that room, you say,’ repeated Lady Alice.

‘Yes, my lady, the green chamber.’

‘Well, what about it—come, woman, did not you sleep for years in that room?’

‘Ay, my lady, a good while.’

‘And what did you see there?’

‘A deal.’

‘*What*, I say?’

‘Well, supposin’ I was to say devils,’ replied Donica.

Lady Alice sneered.

‘What did poor Lady Marlowe see there?’ demanded Donica, looking with her odd eyes askance at Lady Alice’s carpet, and backing her question with a nod.

‘Well, you know I never heard exactly; but my darling creature was, as you remember, dying of a consumption at the time, and miserably nervous, and fancied things, no doubt, as people do.’

‘Well, she did; I knew it,’ said Donica.

‘You may have conjectured—every one can do that; but I rather think my poor dear Amy would have told *me*, had she cared to divulge it to any living being. I am persuaded she herself suspected it was an illusion—fancy; but I know she had a horror of the room, and I am sure my poor girl’s dying request ought to have been respected.’

‘So it ought, my lady,’ said Donica, turning up her eyes, and raising her lean hands together, while she slowly shook her head. ‘So I said to him, and in like manner his own father’s dying *orders*, for such

they was, my lady; and they may say what they will of Sir Harry, poor gentleman!

—But he was a kind man, and good to many that had not a good word for him after, though there may a' been many a little thing that was foolish or the like; but there is mercy above for all, and the bishop that is now, then he was the master of the great school where our young gentlemen used to go to, was with him.'

'When he was dying?' said Lady Alice.

'Ay, my lady, a beautiful summer it was, and the doctor, nor I, thought it would be nothing to speak of; but he was anxious in his mind from the first, and he wrote for Doctor Wyndale—it was the holidays then—asking him to come to him; and he did, but Sir Harry had took an unexpected turn for the worse, and not much did he ever say, the Lord a' mercy on us, after that good gentleman, he's the bishop now, came to Marlowe, and he prayed by his bed, and closed his eyes; and I, in and out, and wanted there every minute, could not but

hear some of what he said, which it was not much.'

'He said something about that green chamber, as you call it, I always understood?' said Lady Alice, interrogatively.

'Yes, my lady, he wished it shut up, or taken down, or summat that way; "but man proposes and God disposes," and there's small affection and less gratitude to be met with now-a-days.'

'I think, Donica Gwynn, and I always thought, that you knew a good deal more than you chose to tell me. Some people are reserved and secret, and I suppose it is your way; but I don't think it could harm you to treat me more as your friend.'

Donica rose, and courtesied as she said—

'You have always treated me friendly, I'm sure, my lady, and I hope I am thankful; and this I know, I'll be a faithful servant to your ladyship so long as I continue in your ladyship's service.'

'I know that very well; but I wish you were franker with me, that's all—here are the keys.'

So Donica, with very little ceremony, assumed the keys of office.

‘And pray what *do* you mean exactly?’ said Lady Alice, rising and drawing on her glove, and not looking quite straight at the housekeeper as she spoke; ‘do you mean to say that Lady Jane is giddy or imprudent? Come, be distinct.’

‘I can’t say what she is, my lady, but she may be brought into folly some way. I only know this much, please my lady, it will be good for her you should be nigh, and your eye and thoughts about her, at least till the General returns.’

‘Well, Gwynn, I see you don’t choose to trust me.’

‘I have, my lady, spoke that free to you as I would not to any other, I think, alive.’

‘No, Gwynn, you don’t trust me; you have your reasons, I suppose; but I think you are a shrewd woman—shrewd and mean well. I don’t suppose that you could talk as you do without a reason; and though I can’t see any myself, not believing in apparitions or—or——’

She nearly lost the thread of her discourse at this point, for as she spoke the word apparition, the remembrance of the young gentleman whom she had seen in Wardlock Church rose in her memory—handsome, pale, with sealed lips, and great eyes—unreadable as night—the resurrection of another image. The old yearning and horror overpowered the train of her thoughts, and she floundered into silence, and coughed into her handkerchief, to hide her momentary confusion.

‘What was I going to say?’ she said, briskly, meaning to refer her break-down to that little fit of coughing, and throwing on Gwynn the onus of setting her speech in motion again.

‘Oh! yes. I *don't* believe in those things not a bit. But Jennie, poor thing, though she has not treated me quite as she might, is a young wife, and very pretty; and the house is full of wicked young men from London; and her old fool of a husband chooses to go about his business and leave

her to her devices—*that's* what you mean, Gwynn, and *that's* what I *understand*.'

'I have said all I can, my lady; you can help her, and be near her night and day,' said Donica.

'Sir Jekyl in his invitation bid me choose my own room—so I shall. I'll choose that oddly-shaped little room that opens into hers—if I remember rightly, the room that my poor dear Amy occupied in her last illness.'

'And, my lady, do you take the key of the door, and keep it in your bag, please.'

'Of the door of communication between the two rooms?'

'Yes, my lady.'

'*Why* should I take it; you would not have me lock her up?'

'Well, no, to be sure, my lady.'

'Then *why*?'

'Because there is no bolt to her door, inside or out. You will see what I mean, my lady, when you are there.'

'Because she can't secure her door with-

out it, I'm to take possession of her key!' said Lady Alice, with a dignified sneer.

'Well, my lady, it may seem queer, but you'll see what I mean.'

Lady Alice tossed her stately head.

'Any commands in particular, please, my lady, before you leave?' inquired Donica, with one of her dry little courtesies.

'No; and I must go. Just hand this pillow and bag to the man; and I suppose you wish your respects to Miss Beatrix?'

To all which, in her own way, Donica Gwynn assented; and the old lady, assisted by her footman, got into the carriage, and nodded a pale and silent farewell to her housekeeper; and away drove the old carriage at a brisk pace toward Marlowe Manor.

CHAPTER XIX.

LADY ALICE TAKES POSSESSION.

WHAT to the young would seem an age; what, even in the arithmetic of the old, counts for something, about seventeen years had glided into the eternal past since last Lady Alice had beheld the antique front and noble timber of Marlowe Manor; and memory was busy with her heart, and sweet and bitter fancies revisiting her old brain, as her saddened eyes gazed on that fair picture of the past. Old faces gone, old times changed, and she, too, but the shadow of her former self, soon, like those whom she remembered there, to vanish quite, and be missed by no one.

‘Where is Miss Beatrix?’ inquired the old lady, as she set her long slim foot upon the oak flooring of the hall. ‘I’ll rest a moment here.’ And she sat down upon a

carved bench, and looked with sad and dreaming eyes through the open door upon the autumnal landscape flushed with the setting sun, the season and the hour harmonising regretfully with her thoughts.

Her maid came at the summons of the footman. 'Tell her that granny has come,' said the old woman gently. '*You* are quite well, Jones?'

Jones made her smirk and courtesy, and was quite well; and so tripped up the great stair to apprise her young mistress.

'Tell the new housekeeper, please, that Lady Alice Redcliffe wishes very much to see her for a moment in the hexagon dressing-room at the end of the hatchment-gallery,' said the old lady, names and localities coming back to her memory quite naturally in the familiar old hall.

And as she spoke, being an active-minded old lady, she rose, and before her first message had reached Beatrix, was ascending the well-known stairs, with its broad shining steps of oak, and her hand on its ponderous banister, feeling strangely, all in a moment,

how much more she now needed that support, and that the sum of the seventeen years was something to her as to others.

On the lobby, just outside this dressing-room door, which stood open, letting the dusky sunset radiance, so pleasant and so sad, fall upon the floor and touch the edges of the distant banisters, she was met by smiling Beatrix.

‘Darling!’ cried the girl, softly, as she threw her young arms round the neck of the stately and thin old lady. ‘Darling, darling, I’m so glad!’

She had been living among strangers, and the sight and touch of her true old friend was reassuring.

Granny’s thin hands held her fondly. It was pretty to see this embrace, in the glow of the evening sun, and the rich brown tresses of the girl close to the ashen locks of old Lady Alice, who, with unwonted tears in her eyes, was smiling on her very tenderly. She was softened that evening. Perhaps it was her real nature, disclosed for a few genial moments, generally hidden.

under films of reserve or pride—the veil of the flesh.

‘I think she does like her old granny,’ said Lady Alice, with a gentle little laugh; one thin hand on her shoulder, the other smoothing back her thick girlish tresses.

‘I do love you, granny; you were always so good to me, and you are so—so *fond* of me. Now, you are tired, darling; you must take a little wine—here is Mrs. Sinnott coming—Mrs. Sinnott.’

‘No, dear, no wine; I’m very well. I wish to see Mrs. Sinnott, though. She’s your new housekeeper, is not she?’

‘Yes; and I’m so glad poor, good old Donnie Gwynn is with you. You know she would not stay; but our new housekeeper is, I’m told, a very good creature too. Grandmamma wants to speak to you, Mrs. Sinnott.’

Lady Alice by this time had entered the dressing-room, three sides of which, projecting like a truncated bastion, formed a great window, which made it, for its size, the best lighted in the house. In the wall

at the right, close to this entrance, is the door which admits to the green chamber; in the opposite wall, but nearer the window, a door leading across the end of the hatchment-gallery, with its large high window, by a little passage, screened off by a low oak partition, and admitting to a bed-room on the opposite side of the gallery.

In the middle of the Window dressing-room stood Lady Alice, and looked round regretfully, and said to herself, with a little shake of the head—

‘ Yes, yes, poor thing !’

She was thinking of poor Lady Marlowe, whom, with her usual perversity, although a step-daughter, she had loved very tenderly, and who in her last illness had tenanted these rooms, in which, seventeen years ago, this old lady had sat beside her and soothed her sickness, and by her tenderness, no doubt, softened those untold troubles which gathered about her bed as death drew near.

‘ How do you do, Mrs. Sinnott ?’ said

stately Lady Alice, recovering her dry and lofty manner.

‘Lady Alice Redcliffe, my grandmamma,’ said Beatrix, in an undertoned introduction, in the housekeeper’s ear.

Mrs. Sinnott made a fussy little courtesy.

‘Your ladyship’s apartments, which is at the other end of the gallery, please, is quite ready, my lady.’

‘I don’t mean to have those rooms, though—that’s the reason I sent for you—please read this note, it is from Sir Jekyl Marlowe. By-the-bye, is your master at home?’

‘No, he was out.’

‘Well, be so good as to read this.’

And Lady Alice placed Beatrix’s note of invitation in Mrs. Sinnott’s hand, and pointed to a passage in the autograph of Sir Jekyl, which spoke thus:—

‘P.S.—Do come, dearest little mamma, and you shall command everything. Choose your own apartments and hours, and, in short, rule us all. With all my worldly goods I thee endow, and place Mrs. Sinnott at your orders.’

‘Well, Mrs. Sinnott, I choose *these* apartments, if you please,’ said Lady Alice, sitting down stiffly, and thereby taking possession.

‘Very well, my lady,’ said Mrs. Sinnott, dropping another courtesy; but her sharp red nose and little black eyes looked sceptical and uneasy; ‘and I suppose, Miss,’ here she paused, looking at Beatrix.

‘You are to do whatever Lady Alice directs,’ said the young lady.

‘This here room, you know, Miss, is the dressing-room properly of the green chamber.’

‘Lady Jane does not use it, though?’ replied the new visitor.

‘But the General, when he comes back,’ insinuated Mrs. Sinnott.

‘Of course, he shall have it. I’ll remove then; but in the meantime, liking these rooms, from old remembrances, best of any, I will occupy them, Beatrix; *this* as a dressing-room, and the apartment *there* as bed-room. I hope I don’t give you a great deal of trouble,’ added Lady Alice, address-

ing the housekeeper, with an air that plainly said that she did not care a pin whether she did or not.

So this point was settled, and Lady Alice sent for her maid and her boxes; and rising, she approached the door of the green chamber, and pointing to it, said to Beatrix—

‘And so Lady Jane has this room. Do you like her, Beatrix?’

‘I can’t say I know her, grandmamma.’

‘No, I dare say not. It is a large room—too large for my notion of a cheerful bed-room.’

The old lady drew near, and knocked.

‘She’s not there?’

‘No, she’s in the terrace-garden.’

Lady Alice pushed the door open, and looked in.

‘A very long room. That room is longer than my drawing-room at Wardlock, and that is five and thirty feet long. Dismal, I say—though so much light, and that portrait—Sir Harry smirking there. What a look of duplicity in that

face! He was an old man when I can remember him; an old beau; a wicked old man, rouged and whitened; he used to paint under his eyelashes, and had, they said, nine or ten sets of false teeth, and always wore a black curled wig that made his contracted countenance more narrow. There were such lines of cunning and meanness about his eyes, actually crossing one another. Jekyl hated him, I think. I don't think anybody but a fool could have really liked him; he was so curiously selfish, and so contemptible; he was attempting the life of a wicked young man at seventy !'

Lady Alice had been speaking as it were in soliloquy, staring drearily on the clever portrait in gold lace and ruffles, stricken by the spell of that painted canvas into a dream.

'Your grandpapa, my dear, was not a good man; and I believe he injured my poor son irreparably, and your *father*. Well—these things, though never forgotten, are best not spoken of when people happen

to be connected. For the sake of others we bear our pain in silence ; but the heart knoweth its own bitterness.'

And so saying, the old lady drew back from the threshold of Lady Jane's apartment, and closed the door with a stern countenance.

CHAPTER XX.

AN ALTERCATION.

ALMOST at the same moment Sir Jekyl entered the hexagon, or, as it was more pleasantly called, the Window dressing-room, from the lobby. He was quite radiant, and, in that warm evening light, struck Lady Alice as looking quite marvellously youthful.

‘Well, Jekyl Marlowe, you see you have brought me here at last,’ said the old lady, extending her hand stiffly, like a wooden marionette, her thin elbow making a right angle.

‘So I have ; and I shall always think the better of my eloquence for having prevailed. You’re a thousand times welcome, and not tired, I hope ; the journey is not much after all.’

‘Thanks ; no, the distance is not much,

the fatigue nothing,' said Lady Alice, drawing her fingers horizontally back from his hospitable pressure. 'But it is not always distance that separates people, or fatigue that depresses one.'

'No, of course; fifty things; rheumatism, temper, hatred, affliction: and I am so delighted to see you! Trixie, dear, would not grandmamma like to see her room? Send for'——

'Thank you, I mean to stay here,' said Lady Alice.

'*Here!*' echoed Sir Jekyl, with a rather bewildered smile.

'I avail myself of the privilege you give me; your postscript to Beatrix's note, you know. You tell me there to choose what rooms I like best,' said the old lady, drily, at the same time drawing her bag toward her, that she might be ready to put the documents in evidence, in case he should dispute it.

'Oh! did I?' said the Baronet, with the same faint smile.

Lady Alice nodded, and then threw back

her head, challenging contradiction by a supercilious stare, her hand firmly upon the bag as before.

‘But this room, you know; it’s anything but a comfortable one—don’t you think?’ said Sir Jekyl.

‘I like it,’ said the inflexible old lady, sitting down.

‘And I’m afraid there’s a little difficulty,’ he continued, not minding. ‘For this is General Lennox’s dressing-room. Don’t you think it might be awkward?’ and he chuckled agreeably.

‘General Lennox is absent in London, on business,’ said Lady Alice, grim as an old Diana; and Jane does not use it, and there *can* be no *intelligible* objection to my having it in his absence.’

There was a little smile, that yet was not a smile, and a slight play about Sir Jekyl’s nostrils, as he listened to this speech. They came when he was vicious; but with a flush, he commanded himself, and only laughed slightly, and said—

‘It is really hardly a concern of mine,

provided my guests are happy. You don't mean to have your bed into this room, do you ?'

'I mean to sleep *there*,' she replied drily, stabbing with her long forefinger toward the door on the opposite side of the room.

'Well, I can only say I'd have fancied, for other reasons, these the very last rooms in the house you would have chosen—particularly as this really belongs to the green chamber. However, you and Lady Jane can arrange that between you. You'd have been very comfortable where we would have put you, and you'll be very *uncomfortable* here, I'm afraid ; but perhaps I'm not making allowance for the affection you have for Lady Jane, the length of time that has passed since you've seen her, and the pleasure of being so near her.'

There was an agreeable irony in this ; for the Baronet knew that they had never agreed very well together, and that neither spoke very handsomely of the other behind her back. At the same time, this was no conclusive proof of unkindness on Lady

Alice's part, for her goodwill sometimes showed itself under strange and uncomfortable disguises.

'Beatrix, dear, I hope they are seeing to your grandmamma's room ; and you'll want candles, it is growing dark. Altogether I'm afraid you're very uncomfortable, little mother ; but if *you* prefer it, you know, of course I'm silent.'

With these words he kissed the old lady's chilly cheek, and vanished.

As he ran down the darkening stairs the Baronet was smiling mischievously ; and when, having made his long straight journey to the foot of the back stairs, he re-ascended, and passing through the two little ante-rooms, entered his own homely bed-chamber, and looked at his handsome and wonderfully preserved face in the glass, he laughed outright two or three comfortable explosions at intervals, and was evidently enjoying some fun in anticipation.

When, a few minutes later, that proud sad beauty, Lady Jane, followed by her maid, sailed rustling into the Window

dressing-room—I call it so in preference—and there saw, by the light of a pair of wax candles, a stately figure seated on the sofa at the further end in grey silk draperies, with its feet on a boss, she paused in an attitude of sublime surprise, with just a gleam of defiance in it.

‘How d’ y’ do, Jennie, my dear?’ said a voice, on which, as on the tones of an old piano, a few years had told a good deal, but which she recognised with some little surprise, for notwithstanding Lady Alice’s note accepting the Baronet’s invitation, he had talked and thought of her actually coming to Marlowe as a very unlikely occurrence indeed.

‘Oh! oh! Lady Alice Redcliffe!’ exclaimed the young wife, setting down her bed-room candle, and advancing with a transitory smile to her old kinswoman, who half rose from her throne and kissed her on the cheek as she stooped to meet her salutation. ‘You have only arrived a few minutes; I saw your carriage going round from the door.’

‘About forty minutes—hardly an hour. How you have filled up, Jane ; you’re quite an imposing figure since I saw you. I don’t think it unbecoming ; your *embon-point* does very well ; and you’re quite well ?’

‘*Very* well—and you ?’

‘I’m pretty well, dear, a good deal fatigued ; and so you’re a wife, Jennie, and very happy, I hope.’

‘I can’t say I have anything to trouble me. I am quite happy, that is, as happy as other people, I suppose.’

‘I hear nothing but praises of your husband. I shall be so happy to make his acquaintance,’ continued Lady Alice.

‘He has had to go up to town about business this morning, but he’s to return very soon.’

‘How soon, dear ?’

‘In a day or two,’ answered the young wife.

‘To-morrow ?’ inquired Lady Alice, drily.

‘Or next day,’ rejoined Lady Jane, with a little stare.

‘Do you *really*, my dear Jane, expect him here the day after to-morrow?’

‘He said he should be detained only a day or two in town.’

Old Lady Alice shook her incredulous head, looking straight before her.

‘I don’t think he can have said that, Jane, for he wrote to a friend of mine, the day before yesterday, mentioning that he should be detained by business at least a week.’

‘Oh! did he?’

‘Yes, and Jekyl Marlowe, I dare say, thinks he will be kept there *longer*.’

‘I should fancy *I* am a better opinion, rather, upon that point, than Sir Jekyl Marlowe,’ said Lady Jane, loftily, and perhaps a little angrily.

The old lady, with closed lips, at this made a little nod, which might mean anything.

‘And I can’t conceive how it can concern Sir Jekyl, or even you, Lady Alice, what business my husband may have in town.’

It was odd how sharp they were growing upon this point.

‘ Well, Sir Jekyl’s another thing ; but *me*, of course, it does concern, because I shall have to give him up his room again when he returns.’

‘ What room ?’ inquired Lady Jane, honestly puzzled.

‘ *This* room,’ answered the old lady, like one conscious that she drops, with the word, a gage of battle.

‘ But this is *my* room.’

‘ You don’t use it, Lady Jane. *I* wish to occupy it. I shall, of course, give it up on your husband’s return ; in the meantime I deprive you of nothing by taking it. Do I ?’

‘ That’s not the question, Lady Alice. It is *my* room—it is *my* dressing-room—and I don’t mean to give it up to *any* one. You are the last person on earth who would allow *me* to take such a liberty with *you*. I don’t *understand* it.’

‘ Don’t be excited, my dear Jenny,’ said

Lady Alice—an exhortation sometimes a little inconsistently administered by members of her admirable sex when they are themselves most exciting.

‘ I’m not in the least excited, Lady Alice; but I’ve had a note from you,’ said Lady Jane, in rather a choking key.

‘ You have,’ acquiesced her senior.

‘ And I connect your extraordinary intrusion here, with it.’

Lady Alice nodded.

‘ I do, and—and I’m right. You mean to insult me. It is a shame—an *outrage*. What do you mean, madam?’

‘ I’d have you to remember, Jane Chetwynd (the altercation obliterated her newly-acquired name of Lennox), that I am your relation and your senior.’

‘ Yes, you’re my cousin, and my senior by fifty years; but an old woman may be very impertinent to a young one.’

‘ *Compose* yourself, if you please, *compose* yourself,’ said Lady Alice, in the same philosophic vein, but with colour a little heightened.

‘I don’t know what you mean—you’re a disgraceful old woman. I’ll complain to my husband, and I’ll tell Sir Jekyl Marlowe. Either you or I must leave this house to-night,’ declaimed Lady Jane, with a most beautiful blush, and eyes flashing lurid lightnings.

‘You forget yourself, my dear,’ said the old lady, rising grimly and confronting her.

‘No, I don’t, but *you* do. It’s perfectly disgusting and intolerable,’ cried Lady Jane, with a stamp.

‘One moment, if you please—you can afford to listen for one moment, I suppose,’ said the old lady, in a very low, dry tone, laying two of her lean fingers upon the snowy arm of the beautiful young lady, who, with a haughty contraction and an uplifted head, withdrew it fiercely from her touch. ‘You forget your maid, I think. You had better tell her to withdraw, hadn’t you?’

‘I don’t care; why should I?’ said Lady Jane, in a high key.

‘ Beatrix, dear, run into my bed-room for a moment,’ said ‘Granny’ to that distressed and perplexed young lady, who, accustomed to obey, instantly withdrew.

CHAPTER XXI.

LADY ALICE IN BED.

‘WE may be alone together, if *you* choose it; if not, *I* can’t help it,’ said Lady Alice, in a very low and impressive key.

‘Well, it’s nothing to me,’ said Lady Jane, more calmly and sullenly—‘nothing at all—but as you insist—Cecile, you may go for a few minutes.’

This permission was communicated sulkily, in French.

‘Now, Jane, you shall hear me,’ said the old lady, so soon as the maid had disappeared and the doors were shut; ‘you must hear me with patience, if not with respect—*that* I don’t expect—but remember you have no mother, and I am an old woman and your kinswoman, and it is my duty to speak’—

‘I’m rather tired standing,’ interrupted

Lady Jane, in a suppressed passion. ‘ Besides, you say you don’t want to be overheard, and you can’t know who may be on the *lobby there,*’ and she pointed with her jewelled fingers at the door. ‘ I’ll go into my bed-room, if you please ; and I have not the slightest objection to hear everything you can possibly say. Don’t fancy I’m the least afraid of you.’

Saying which Lady Jane, taking up her bed-room candle, rustled out of the room, without so much as looking over her shoulder to see whether the prophetsess was following.

She did follow, and I dare say her lecture was not mitigated by Lady Jane’s rudeness. That young lady was lighting her candles on her dressing-table when her kinswoman entered and shut the door, without an invitation. She then seated herself serenely, and cleared her voice.

‘ I live very much out of the world—in fact, quite to myself ; but I learn occasionally what my relations are doing ; and I was grieved, Jane, to hear a great deal that

was very unpleasant, to say the least, about you.'

Something between a smile and a laugh was her only answer.

'Yes, extremely foolish. I don't, of course, say there was anything wicked, but very foolish and reckless. I know perfectly how you were talked of; and I know also why you married that excellent but old man, General Lennox.'

'I don't think anyone talked about me. Everybody is talked about. There has been enough of this rubbish. I burnt your odious letter,' broke in Lady Jane, incoherently.

'And would, no doubt, burn the writer, if you could.'

As there was no disclaimer, Lady Alice resumed.

'Now, Jane, you have married a most respectable old gentleman; I dare say you have nothing on earth to conceal from him—remember I've said all along I don't suppose there is—but as the young wife of an old man, you ought to

remember how very delicate your position is.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean, *generally*,' answered the old lady, oracularly.

'I do declare this is perfectly insufferable! What's the meaning of this lecture? I'm as little likely, madam, as *you* are to disgrace myself. You'll please to walk out of my room.'

'And how dare you talk to me in that way, young lady; how dare you attempt to hector me like your maid there?' broke out old Lady Alice, suddenly losing her self-command. 'You know what I mean, and what's more, *I* do, too. *We both* know it—you a young bride—what does Jekyl Marlowe invite you down here for? Do you think I imagine he cares twopence about your stupid old husband, and that I don't know he was once making love to you? Of course I do; and I'll have nothing of the sort here—and that's the reason I've come, and that's why I'm in that dressing-room, and that's why I'll write to your husband,

so sure as you give me the slightest uneasiness; and you had better think well what you do.'

The old lady, in a towering passion, with a fierce lustre in her cheeks, and eyes flashing lightning over the face of her opponent, vanished from the room.

Lady Alice had crossed the disputed territory of the Window dressing-room, and found herself in her elected bed-room before she had come to herself. She saw Lady Jane's face still before her, with the lurid astonishment and fear, white and sharp, on it, as when she had threatened a letter to General Lennox.

She sat down a little stunned and confused about the whole thing, incensed and disgusted with Lady Jane, and confirmed in her suspicion by a look she did not like in that young lady's face, and which her peroration had called up. She did not hear the shrilly rejoinder that pursued her through the shut door. She had given way to a burst of passion, and felt a little hot and deaf and giddy.

When the party assembled at dinner Lady Jane exerted herself more than usual. She was agreeable, and even talkative, and her colour had not been so brilliant since her arrival. She sat next to Guy Strangways, and old Lady Alice at the other side of the table did not look triumphant, but sick and sad; and to look at the two ladies you would have set HER down as the defeated and broken-spirited, and Lady Jane as the victrix in the late encounter.

The conversation at this end of the table resembled a dance, in which sometimes each man sets to his partner and turns her round, so that the whole company is frisking and spinning together; sometimes two perform; sometimes a *cavalier seul*. Thus was it with the talk of this section of the dinner-table, above the salt, at which the chief people were seated.

'I've just been asked by Lady Blunket how many miles it is to Wardlock, and I'm ashamed to say I can't answer her,' cried Sir Jekyl diagonally to Lady Alice, so as to cut off four people at his left hand, whose

conversation being at the moment in a precarious way, forthwith expired, and the Baronet and his mother-in-law were left in possession of this part of the stage.

The old lady, as I have said, looked ill and very tired, and as if she had grown all at once very old; and instead of answering, she only nodded once or twice, and signed across the table to Lady Jane.

‘Oh! I forgot,’ said Sir Jekyl; ‘you know Wardlock and all our distances, don’t you, Lady Jane—can you tell me?’

‘I don’t remember,’ said Lady Jane, hardly turning toward him; ‘ten or twelve miles—is not it? it may be a good deal more. I don’t really recollect;’ and this was uttered with an air which plainly said, ‘I don’t really care.’

‘I generally ride my visits, and a mile or two more or less does not signify; but one ought to know all the distances for thirty miles round; you don’t know otherwise who’s your neighbour.’

‘Do you think it an advantage to know that any particular person *is* your neigh-

bour ?' inquired impertinent Drayton, with his light moustache, leaning back and looking drowsily into his glasses after his wont.

'Oh! Mr. Drayton, the country without neighbours—how dreadful!' exclaimed Miss Blunket. 'Existence without friends.'

'Friends—bosh!' said Drayton, confidentially, to his wine.

'There's Drayton scouting friendship, the young cynic!' cried Sir Jekyl. 'Do call him to order, Lady Jane.'

'I rather incline to agree with Mr. Drayton,' said Lady Jane, coldly.

'Do you mean to say you have no friends?' said Sir Jekyl, in well-bred amazement.

'Quite the contrary—I have too many.'

'Come—that's a new complaint. Perhaps they are very new friends?' inquired the Baronet.

'Some of them very old, indeed; but I've found that an old friend means only an old person privileged to be impertinent.'

Lady Jane uttered a musical little laugh

that was very icy as she spoke, and her eye flashed a single insolent glance at old Lady Alice.

At another time perhaps a retort would not have been wanting, but now the old woman's eye returned but a wandering look, and her face expressed nothing but apathy and sadness.

'Grandmamma, dear, I'm afraid you are very much tired,' whispered Beatrix when they reached the drawing-room, sitting beside her after she had made her comfortable on a sofa, with cushions to her back; 'you would be better lying down, I think.'

'No, dear—no, darling. I think in a few minutes I'll go to my room. I'm not very well. I'm tired—*very* tired.'

And poor old granny, who was speaking very gently, and looking very pale and sunken, sighed deeply—it was almost a moan.

Beatrix was growing very much alarmed, and accompanied, or rather assisted, the old lady up to the room, where, aided by

her and her maid, she got to her bed in silence, sighing deeply now and then.

She had not been long there when she burst into tears ; and after a violent paroxysm she beckoned to Beatrix, and threw her lean old arms about her neck, saying—

‘I’m sorry I came, child ; I don’t know what to think. I’m too old to bear this agitation—it will kill me.’

Then she wept more quietly, and kissed Beatrix, and whispered—‘Send her out of the room—let her wait in the dressing-room.’

The maid was sitting at the further end of the apartment, and the old lady was too feeble to raise her voice so as to be heard there. So soon as her maid had withdrawn Lady Alice said—

‘Sit by me, Beatrix, darling. I am very nervous, and tell me who is that young man who sat beside Jane Lennox at dinner.’

As she ended her little speech Lady Alice, who, though I dare say actually ill enough, yet did not want to lose credit for all the

exhaustion she fancied beside, closed her eyelids, and leaned a little back on her pillow motionless. This prevented her seeing that if she were nervous Beatrix was so also, though in another way, for her colour was heightened very prettily as she answered.

‘ You mean the tall, slight young man at Lady Jane’s right ? ’ inquired Beatrix.

‘ That beautiful but melancholy-looking young man whom we saw at Wardlock Church, ’ said Lady Alice, forgetting for the moment that she had never divulged the result of her observations from the gallery to any mortal but Sir Jekyl. Beatrix, who forgot nothing, and knew that her brief walk at Wardlock with that young gentleman had not been confessed to anyone, was confounded on hearing herself thus, as she imagined, taxed with her secret.

She was not more secret than young ladies generally are ; but whom could she have told at Wardlock ? which of the old women of that time-honoured sisterhood was she to have invited to talk romance

with her? and now she felt very guilty, and was blushing in silent confusion at the pearl ring on her pretty, slender finger, not knowing what to answer, or how to begin the confession which she fancied her grandmamma was about to extort.

Her grandmamma, however, relieved her on a sudden by saying—

‘I forgot, dear, I told you nothing of that dreadful day at Wardlock Church, the day I was so ill. I told your papa *only*; but the young man is here, and I may as well tell you now that he bears a supernatural likeness to my poor lost darling. Jekyl knew how it affected me, and he never told me. It was so like Jekyl. I think, dear, I should not have come here at all had I known that dreadful young man was here.’

‘Dreadful! How is he dreadful?’ exclaimed Beatrix.

‘From his likeness to my lost darling—my dear boy—my poor, precious, murdered Guy,’ answered the old lady, lying back, and looking straight toward the ceiling with

upturned eyes and clasped hands.' She repeated—'Oh! Guy—Guy—Guy—my poor child!'

She looked like a dying nun praying to her patron saint.

'His name is Strangways—Mr. Guy Strangways,' said Beatrix.

'Ah, yes, darling! Guy was the name of my dear boy, and Strangways was the name of his companion—an evil companion, I dare say.'

Beatrix knew that the young man whom her grandmamma mourned had fallen in a duel, and that, reasonably or unreasonably, her father was blamed in the matter. More than this she had never heard. Lady Alice had made her acquainted with thus much; but with preambles so awful that she had never dared to open the subject herself, or to question her 'Granny' beyond the point at which her disclosure had stopped.

That somehow it reflected on Sir Jekyl prevented her from inquiring of any servant, except old Donica, who met her curiosity

with a sound jobation, and told her if ever she plagued her with questions about family misfortunes like that, she would speak to Sir Jekyl about it. Thus Beatrix only knew how Guy Deverell had died—that her grandmamma chose to believe he had been murdered, and insisted beside in blaming her father, Sir Jekyl, somehow for the catastrophe.

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW EVERYTHING WENT ON.

‘Go down, dear, to your company,’ resumed Lady Alice, sadly; ‘they will miss you. And tell your father, when he comes to the drawing-room, I wish to see him, and won’t detain him long.’

So they parted, and a little later Sir Jekyl arrived with a knock at the old lady’s bed-room door.

‘Come in—oh! yes—Jekyl—well, I’ve only a word to say. Sit down a moment at the bedside.’

‘And how do you feel now, you dear old soul?’ inquired the Baronet, cheerfully. He looked strong and florid, as gentlemen do after dinner, with a genial air of contentment, and a fragrance of his wonderful sherry about him; all which seemed somehow brutal to the nervous old lady.

‘Wonderfully, considering the surprise you had prepared for me, and which might as well have killed me as not,’ she made answer.

‘I know, to be sure—Strangways, you mean. Egad! I forgot. Trixie ought to have told you.’

‘*You* ought to have told me. I don’t think I should have come here, Jekyl, had I known it.’

‘If I had known *that*,’ thought Sir Jekyl, with a regretful pang, ‘I’d have made a point of telling you.’ But he said aloud—

‘Yes. It was a *sottise*; but *I*’ve got over the likeness so completely that I forgot how it agitated you. But I ought to tell you they have no connexion with the family—none in the world. Pelter and Crowe, you know—devilish sharp dogs—my lawyers in town—they are regular detectives, by Jove! and know everything—and particularly have had for years a steady eye upon them and their movements; and I have had a most decided letter from them, assuring me that there has not been the slightest move-

ment in that quarter, and therefore there is, absolutely, as I told you from the first, nothing in it.'

'And what Deverells are now living?' inquired the old lady, very pale.

'Two first cousins, they tell me—old fellows now; and one of them has a son or two; but not one called Guy, and none answering this description, you see; and neither have a shadow of a claim, or ever pretended; and as for that unfortunate accident'——

'Pray *spare* me,' said the old lady, grimly.

'Well, they did not care a brass farthing about the poor fellow, so they would never move to give me trouble in that matter; and, in fact, people never do stir in law, and put themselves to serious expense, purely for a sentiment—even a bad one.'

'I remember some years ago you *were* very *much* alarmed, Jekyl.'

'No, I was not. Who the plague says that? There's nothing, thank Heaven, I need fear. One does not like to be worried

with lawsuits—that's all—though there is and can be no real danger in them.'

'And was it from these cousins you apprehended lawsuits?' inquired Lady Alice.

'No, not exactly—no, not at all. I believe that fellow Strangways—that fellow that used to live on poor Guy—I fancy he was the mover of it—indeed I know he was.'

'What did they proceed for?' asked the old lady. 'You never told me—you are so secret, Jekyl.'

'They did not proceed at all—how could I? Their attorneys had cases before counsel affecting me—that's all I ever heard; and they say now it was all Strangways' doing—that is, Pelter and Crowe say so. I wish I were secret.'

Old Lady Alice here heaved a deep groan, and said, not with asperity, but with a fatigued abhorrence—

'Go away; I wonder I can bear you near me.'

'Thank you very much,' said the Baronet, rising, with one of his pleasant chuckles.

'I can't tell you how glad I am to see you here, and I know you'll be very glad to see me in the morning, when you are a little rested.'

So he kissed the tips of his fingers and touched them playfully to the back of her thin hand, which she withdrew with a little frown, as if they chilled her. And by her direction he called in her maid, whom he asked very smilingly how she did, and welcomed to Marlowe; and she, though a little *passé*, having heard the fame of Sir Jekyl, and many stories of his brilliant adventures, was very modest and fluttered on the occasion. And with another little petting speech to Lady Alice, the radiant Baronet withdrew.

It is not to be supposed that Lady Alice's tremors communicated themselves to Beatrix. Was it possible to regard that handsome, refined young man, who spoke in that low, sweet voice, and smiled so intelligently, and talked so pleasantly, and with that delicate flavour of romance at times, in the light of a goblin?

The gentlemen had made their whist-party. The Rev. Dives Marlowe was chatting to, not with, Lady Jane, who sat listlessly on an ottoman. That elderly girl, Miss Blunket, with the *naïve* ways, the animated, smiling, and rather malevolent countenance, had secured little Linnett, who bore his imprisonment impatiently and wearily it must be owned. When Miss Blunket was enthusiastic it was all very well; but her playfulness was wicked, and her satire gaily vitriolic.

‘Mr. Marlowe is fascinated, don’t you think?’ she inquired of harmless little Linnett, glancing with an arch flash of her fierce eyes at the Rev. Dives.

‘She’s awfully handsome,’ said Linnett, honestly.

‘Oh, dear, you wicked creature, you can’t think I meant that. She is some kind of cousin, I think—is not she? And her husband has that great living—what’s its name?—and no relation in the Church; and Lady Jane, they say, rules him—and Sir Jekyl, some people say, rules her.’

Linnett returned her arch glance with an honest stare of surprise.

‘I had no idea of that, egad,’ said he.

‘She thinks him so wise in all worldly matters, you know ; and people in London fancied she would have been the second Lady Marlowe, if she had not met General Lennox just at a critical time, and fallen in love with him ;’ and as she said this she laughed.

‘Really!’ exclaimed Linnett ; and he surveyed Lady Jane in this new light wonderingly.

‘I really don’t know ; I heard it said merely ; but very likely, you know, it is not true,’ she answered with an artless giggle.

‘I knew you were quizzing—though, by Jove, you did sell me at first ; but I really think Sir Jekyl’s a little spoony on that pretty little Mrs. Maberly. Is she a widow ?’

‘Oh, dear, no—at least, not quite ; she has a husband in India, but then, poor man, he’s so little in the way she need hardly wish him dead.’

'I see,' said Linnett, looking at Mrs. Maberly with a grave interest.

While Miss Blunket was entertaining and instructing little Linnett with this sort of girlish chatter, and from the whist-table, between the deals, arose those critical discussions and reviews, relieved now and then by a joke from the Baronet, or from his partner, Colonel Doocey, at the piano, countenanced by old Lady Blunket, who had come to listen and remained to doze, Beatrix, her fingers still on the keys, was listening to young Strangways.

There are times, lights, accidents, under which your handsome young people become incredibly more handsome, and this Guy Strangways now shared in that translated glory, as he leaned on the back of a tall carved chair, sometimes speaking, sometimes listening.

'It is quite indescribable, Miss Marlowe, how your music interests me—I should say, haunts me. I thought at first it was because you loved ballad music, which I also love ; but it is not that—it is something higher and more peculiar.'

‘I am sure you were right at first, for I *know* I am a very indifferent musician,’ said Beatrix, looking down under her long lashes on the keys over which the jewelled fingers of her right hand wandered with hardly a tinkle, just tracing dreamily one of those sweet melancholy airs which made in fancy an accompaniment to the music of that young fellow’s words.

How beautiful she looked, too, with eyes lowered and parted lips, and that listening smile—not quite a smile—drinking in with a strange rapture of pride and softness the flatteries which she refused and yet invited.

‘It is something higher and mysterious, which, perhaps, I shall never attempt to explain, unless, indeed, I should risk talking very wildly—too wildly for you to understand, or, if you did, perhaps—to forgive.’

‘You mentioned a Breton ballad you once heard,’ said Beatrix, frightened, as girls will sometimes become whenever the hero of their happy hours begins on a sudden to define.

‘Yes,’ he said, and the danger of the crisis was over. ‘I wish so much I could remember the air, you would so enter into its character, and make its wild unfathomable melancholy so beautifully touching in your clear contralto.’

‘You must not flatter me; I want to hear more of that ballad.’

‘If flattery be to speak more highly than one thinks, who can flatter Miss Marlowe?’ Again the crisis was menacing. ‘Besides, I did not tell you we are leaving, I believe, in a day or two, and on the eve of so near a departure, may I not improve the few happy moments that are left me, and be permitted the privilege of a leave-taking, to speak more frankly, and perhaps less wisely than one who is destined to be all his life a neighbour?’

‘Papa, I am sure, will be very sorry to hear that you and Monsieur Varbarriere are thinking of going so soon; I must try, however, to improve the time, and hear all you can tell me of those interesting people of Brittany.’

‘ Yes, they are. I will make them another visit—a sadder visit, Mademoiselle—for me a far more interesting one. You have taught me how to hear and see them. I never felt the spirit of Villemarque, or the romance and melancholy of that antique region, till I had the honour of knowing you.’

‘ My friends always laughed at me about Brittany. I suppose different people are interested by different subjects; but I do not think anyone could read at all about that part of the world and not be fascinated. You promised to tell all you remember of that Breton ballad.’

‘ Oh, yes; the haunted lady, the beautiful lady, the heiress of Carlowel, now such a grand ruin, became enamoured of a mysterious cavalier who wooed her; but he was something not of flesh and blood, but of the spirit world.’

‘ There is exactly such a legend, *so far*, at least, of a castle on the Rhine. I must show it to you. Do you read German?’

‘ Yes, Mademoiselle.’

‘And does the ballad end tragically?’

‘Most tragically. You shall hear.’

‘Where are you, Guy?’ in French, inquired a deep ringing voice.

And on the summons, Guy glanced over his shoulder, and replied.

‘Oh,’ exclaimed the same voice, ‘I demand pardon. I am disturbing conversation, I fear; but an old man in want of assistance will be excused. I want my road book, Guy, and you have got it. Pray, run up-stairs and fetch it.’

With great pleasure, of course, Guy Strangways ran up-stairs to tumble over block-books, letters, diaries, and the general residuum of a half-emptied valise.

Miss Beatrix played a spirited march, which awoke Lady Blunket, whom she had forgotten; and that interesting woman, to make up for lost time, entertained her with a history of the unreasonableness of Smidge, her maid, and a variety of other minute afflictions, which, she assured Beatrix seriously, disturbed her sleep.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DIVAN.

THAT night Sir Jekyl led the gentlemen in a body to his outpost quarters, in the rear of civilisation, where they enjoyed their cigars, brandy and water, and even 'swipes,' prodigiously. It is a noble privilege to be so rich as Sir Jekyl Marlowe. The Jewish price for frankincense was thrice its own weight in gold. How much did that aromatic blue canopy that rolled dimly over this Turkish divan cost that off-handed Sybarite? How many scruples of fine gold were floating in that cloud?

Varbarriere was in his way charmed with his excursion. He enjoyed the jokes and stories of the youngers, and the satiric slang and imperturbable good-humour of their host. The twinkle of his eye, from its deep cavern, and the suavity of his solemn fea-

tures, testified to his profound enjoyment of a meeting to which he contributed, it must be owned, for his own share, little but smoke.

In fact, he was very silent, very observant—observant of more things than the talk perhaps.

All sorts of things were talked about. Of course, no end of horse and dog anecdote—something of wine, something of tobacco, something of the beauties of the opera and the stage, and those sad visions, the fallen angelic of the demimonde—something, but only the froth and sparkle of politics—light conjecture, and pungent scandal, in the spirit of gay satire and profligate comedy.

‘He’s a bad dog, St. Evermore. Did not you hear that about the duel?’ said Drayton.

‘What?’ asked the Baronet, with an unconscious glance at Guy Strangways.

‘He killed that French fool—what’s his name?—unfairly, they say. There has been a letter or something in one of the Paris

and some charming stories were told of Sir Paul Blunket, who was not present; and in less than an hour the party broke up and left Sir Jekyl to his solitary quarters.

The Baronet bid his last guest good-night at the threshold, and then shut his door and locked himself in. It was his custom, here, to sleep with his door locked.

‘What was that fellow laughing at—Varbarriere? I’m certain he was laughing. I never saw a fellow with so completely the cut of a charlatan. I’ll write to Charteris to-night. I *must* learn all about him.’

Then Sir Jekyl yawned, and reflected what a fool Drayton was, what a fellow to talk, and what asses all fellows were at that age; and, being sleepy, he postponed his letter to Charteris to the next morning, and proceeded to undress.

Next morning was bright and pleasant, and he really did not see much good in writing the letter; and so he put it off to a more convenient time.

Shortly after the ladies had left the drawing-room for their bed-rooms, Beatrix,

having looked in for a moment to her grand-mamma's room, and, with a kiss and a good-night, taken wing again, there entered to Lady Alice, as the old plays express it, then composing herself for the night, Lady Jane's maid, with—

‘ Please, my lady, my lady wants to know if your ladyship knows where her ladyship's key may be ? ’

‘ *What key ?* ’

‘ The key of her bedchamber, please, my lady.’

‘ Oh ! the key of my dressing-room. Tell Lady Jane that I have got the key of the Window dressing-room, and mean to keep it,’ replied the old lady, firmly.

The maid executed a courtesy, and departed ; and Lady Alice sank back again upon her pillow, with her eyes and mouth firmly closed, and the countenance of an old lady who is conscious of having done her duty upon one of her sex.

About two minutes later there came a rustle of a dressing-gown and the patter of a swift-slippered tread through the short

passage from the dressing-room, and, without a knock, Lady Jane, with a brilliant flush on her face, ruffled into the room, and, with her head very high, and flashing eyes, demanded—

‘Will you be so good, Lady Alice Redcliffe, as to give me the key of my bedroom?’

To which Lady Alice, without opening her eyes, and with her hands mildly clasped, in the fashion of a mediæval monument, over her breast, meekly and firmly made answer—

‘If you mean the key of the Window dressing-room, Jane, I have already told your maid that I mean to *keep* it!’

‘And I’ll not leave the room till I get it,’ cried Lady Jane, standing fiercely beside the monument.

‘Then you’ll not leave the room to-night, Jane,’ replied the statuesque sufferer on the bed.

‘We shall *see* that. Once more, will you give me my key or not?’

‘The key of my dressing-room door is in

my possession, and I mean to keep it,' repeated the old lady, with a provoking mildness.

'You shan't, madam—you'll do no such thing. You shall give up the key you have stolen. I'll lose my life but I'll make you.'

'Jane, Jane,' said the old lady, 'you are sadly changed for the worse since last I saw you.'

'And if *you're* not, it's only because there was no room for it. Sadly changed indeed—very true. I don't suffer you to bully me as you used at Wardlock.'

'May Heaven forgive and pardon you!' ejaculated the old lady, with great severity, rising perpendicularly and raising both her eyes and hands.

'Keep your prayers for yourself, madam, and give me my key,' demanded the incensed young lady.

'I'll do no such thing; I'll do as I said; and I'll pray how I please, ma'am,' retorted the suppliant, fiercely.

'Your prayers don't signify twopence. You've the temper of a fiend, as all the

world knows; and no one can live in the same house with you,' rejoined Lady Jane.

'That's a wicked lie: my servants live all their days with me.'

'Because they know no one else would take them. But you've the temper of a fury. You haven't a friend left, and everyone hates you.'

'Oh! oh! oh!' moaned Lady Alice, sinking back, with her hand pressed to her heart piteously, and closing her eyes, as she recollected how ill she was.

'Ho! dear me!' exclaimed Lady Jane, in high disdain. 'Had not you better restore my key before you die, old lady?'

'Jane!' exclaimed Lady Alice, recovering in an instant, 'have you no feeling—you know the state I'm in; and you're bent on killing me with your unfeeling brutality?'

'You're perfectly well, ma'am, and you look it. I wish I was half as strong; you oblige me to come all this way, this bitter night, you odious old woman.'

'I see how it is, and why you want the

key. A very little more, and I'll write to General Lennox.'

'Do; and he'll horsewhip you.'

Lady Jane herself was a little stunned at this speech, when she heard it from her own lips; and I think would have recalled it.

'Thank you, Jane; I hope you'll *remember* that. Horsewhip me! No doubt you wish it; but General Lennox is a gentleman, I hope, *although* he has married you; and I don't suppose he would murder a miserable old woman to gratify you.'

'You know perfectly what I mean—if you were a *man* he would horsewhip you; you have done nothing but insult me ever since you entered this house.'

'Thank you; it's quite plain. I shan't forget it. I'll ask him, when he comes, whether he's in the habit of beating women. It is not usual, I believe, among British officers. It *usen't* at least; but everything's getting on—young ladies, and, I suppose, old men—all getting on famously.'

'Give me my key, if you please; and cease talking like a fool,' cried Lady Jane.

‘And what *do* you want of that key? Come, now, young lady, what is it?’

‘I don’t choose to have my door lie open, and I won’t. I’ve no bolt to the inside, and I *will* have my key, madam.’

‘If that’s your object, set your mind at ease. I’ll lock your door myself when you have got to your bed.’

‘So that if the house takes fire I shall be burnt to death!’

‘Pooh! nonsense!’

‘And if I am they’ll hang *you*, I hope.’

‘Thank you. Flogged and hanged!’ And Lady Alice laughed an exceeding bitter laugh. ‘But the wicked violence of your language and *menaces* shan’t deter me from the duty I’ve prescribed to myself. I’ll define my reasons if you like, and I’ll write as soon as you please to General Lennox.’

‘I think you’re *mad*—I do, I assure you. I’ll endure it for once, but depend on it I’ll complain to Sir Jekyl Marlowe, in my husband’s absence, in the morning; and if this

sort of thing is to go on, I had better leave the house forthwith—that's all.'

And having uttered these dignified sentences with becoming emphasis, she sailed luridly away.

'Good-night, Jane,' said Lady Alice, with a dry serenity.

'Don't dare, you insupportable old woman, to wish me good-night,' burst out Lady Jane, whisking round at the threshold.

With which speech, having paused for a moment in defiance, she disappeared, leaving the door wide open, which is, perhaps, as annoying as clapping it, and less vulgar.

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